

Farrah Fawcett, Eat Your Heart Out by dave_starcross

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Billy is low key really smart, Billy's a 'docile drunk', Canon related angst, Follows the plot of season 2 but with Haringrove added to the mix, Hawkins High School Basketball, Insecure Steve, M/M, Mild Gore, Other Additional Tags to Be Added, Parental Abuse, Steve's kind of a bad driver, Steve's still packing his "don't mess with me" vibes from season one, Underage Drinking, canon related violence, implied PTSD, possessive billy

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Bob Newby, Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Tommy H. (Stranger Things), Will Byers

Relationships: Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2017-12-04

Updated: 2018-01-25

Packaged: 2022-04-20 16:30:05

Rating: Mature

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 11

Words: 42,425

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

He almost didn't hear Nancy speaking to him, "Who was that?"

Steve blinked for a moment, "I don't know. But I don't think we'll have to wait long to find out."

And Steve was right. It only took a couple of class periods until news of the new junior had spread like wildfire. Everywhere Steve turned, every conversation he listened into, everyone was talking about him.

About *Billy Hargrove*.

A retelling of Stranger Things Season 2, where all Steve wants to do

is take care of the kids, Billy's the new king in town, and they both somehow get more than they bargained for.

1. Rock You Like a Hurricane

Author's Note:

So this little number derived from me wondering what Stranger Things season 2 would be like if there was an established relationship between Billy and Steve pretty early on. My plan is to cover the entire plot of season two and sprinkle in a little Harringrove goodness (which may derail some of the canon plot but it'll find its way back to it eventually).

Any critiques are more than welcomed! I haven't written in ages it seems, so feedback is much appreciated. Updates will be Mondays/Tuesdays until the story is completed. Unbeta'd, so all mistakes are my own.

Much love, Dave

Chapter Title: "Rock You Like a Hurricane" - Scorpions

STEVE HARRINGTON WAS staring out the driver side window, tapping his index finger on his steering wheel, "It's crap, I know."

Nancy Wheeler looked up at him from the passenger seat, and he knew she was feigning a reassuring look as his eyes were drawn to the papers she held in her hands, "What? No, it's not crap."

Steve shakes his head, "It's not good."

"It's going to be," she tells him, glancing back at several paragraphs on the first page. "Just... It needs some reorganizing." She moves to grab a pen from her bag, raising a brow, "Mind if I mark it?"

He sighed. He didn't know how this all was going to help him. Steve knew the essay was trash, the only way to fix it being to just start all over. "Yeah, sure I guess."

He pretends not to see the small pitying smile Nancy gives as she uncaps the pen and starts giving him suggestions, "So, in the first paragraph you used the basketball game versus Northern as a metaphor for your life, which is great. But then..." she paused to circle some words he'd written. "Around here, you start talking about your granddad's experiences in the war. And I...I don't see how they're connected."

"It connects because... because, you know, we both won," he tells her simply.

The look she gives him is a blank one, as if she's trying to process what he'd said logically.

It just makes him want to bang his head on the steering wheel even more. "Do you think I should start from scratch?" he asked, already knowing the answer.

"No. I mean..." she fumbles her words a little before redirecting the conversation, "When's the deadline?"

"It's tomorrow for early application," he deadpans. "Can you come and help me tonight?"

Nancy's brows furrow together, "We have our dinner tonight, remember?"

Steve lets out a frustrated groan, hitting the back of his head on the head rest, "Oh, my God!"

"We already canceled last week," she pleads. When he doesn't say anything she lets out a huff of her own, moving to pack up her things. "You don't have to go. Just work on this."

"No, no, no. What's the point?" Steve snatches the essay from her, crumbling the damn thing up in his hands and throwing it down at his feet. Nancy watches him in disbelief, "Hey! Calm down."

"I'm calm," he lies, refusing to look at her, "I'm calm. I'm just being honest you know. I mean, I'll end up working for my dad anyway."

The subject of his parents is a rough one, Nancy knows this. Which is

why she's quick to deny it, "That's not true."

He shrugs, "I don't know, Nance. Is that such a bad thing? There's insurance and benefits and all that adult stuff. And if I took it, you know, I could be around for your senior year."

"Steve..." she starts.

"Just look after you for a bit. Make sure you don't forget about this pretty face."

She laughs lightly, glancing away from him, and he can't help but stare at her in that moment. He looks at her, Nancy, his Nancy, the girl he'd fought hell and high water with and for. She thinks he's joking he realizes.

"Nance, I'm being serious." And just to show it, when Nancy looks at him then he leans in to kiss her gently, their lips lingering for a brief moment. When they pull apart, they stare into each other's eyes.

"I love you," he said, the words every bit genuine.

Nancy smiled, "I love you, too."

Their moment was soon interrupted by the sound of a engine revving. Nancy turns, her eyes scanning the semi-crowded parking lot. Steve is the one who gets out of the car first, searching for the source of the noise. Hawkins High School wasn't that large, Steve has talked and seen all the students attending at least once. So when he sees in the distance a blue Camaro, windows down, blasting music, he's left confused. No one there drives a car like that, and no one he knows had California plates either he noticed.

The pair watches the car drive past, the only distinguishing thing Steve seeing is a flood of red hair from someone in the passenger seat. It revs once more before the driver pulls it into a parking spot, shutting the engine off. Steve and Nancy exchange curious glances, only tearing their eyes away when they hear the doors opening.

Steve didn't know what he was expecting, but it wasn't anywhere close to what he was seeing now. The first thing he saw was a denim clad leg swing out from the driver's side, stomping a boot down onto

the ground. It was soon followed by another leg, and the next thing he knew he felt a slight hitch in his breath. The person, a guy he'd never seen before, stepped out of the car, fashioned in a denim jacket and tan, tight shirt tucked into his jeans. He turned to look around the parking lot, giving Steve the chance to see his lean face, his slightly long wavy hair that curled towards his features, and the cigarette that hung from the corner of his mouth. And as his eyes scanned the lot, they soon came to land on Steve's.

Steve felt a strange constriction in his chest, a tingling of anticipation coursing through his limbs, and, somewhere more deep down, a touch of nervousness too. Who the hell was this guy? They didn't stare each other down for long as the strangers eyes flickered over to Nancy, who now was climbing out of the car. Steve saw the way his eyes narrowed at her as he shut the car door.

There was a blur of red from the corner of his eyesight, and he glanced over to see a younger girl getting out of the car as well. She dropped a skateboard onto the pavement, not even giving a second glance back as she took off towards Hawkins Middle School.

Steve looked back at the guy, startled to find that he was boring his eyes into him with this look of *something menacing* . Like he'd just seen something that he wasn't supposed to see. The guy flicked his cigarette into the grass, not even bothering to check if it was still burning, before turning to walk towards the high school.

When he looked around, Steve noticed that they weren't the only ones staring, but somehow the guy had chosen to look directly at *him* . In a weird way, it almost felt like he was trying to challenge Steve.

He almost didn't hear Nancy speaking to him, "Who was that?"

Steve blinked for a moment, "I don't know. But I don't think we'll have to wait long to find out."

And Steve was right. It only took a couple of class periods until news of the new junior had spread like wildfire. Everywhere Steve turned, every conversation he listened into, everyone was talking about him.

About *Billy Hargrove*.

At first the only things he heard about him was about he looked, his toned body, his blonde mullet, his foreign clothes. But as the day progressed, he picked up on some details too, like how he apparently walked like he owned the whole school, how he apparently didn't pay attention in the classes he had, and how apparently Steve's reputation as King of Hawkins was now at stake.

When he heard that one, Steve couldn't help but chuckle silently.

Steve had stopped regarding himself as "king" many months ago. Particularly the moment he realized that if he didn't clean up his act soon, he wouldn't make it to senior year. The thought of being a high school dropout terrified him, mostly because he knew that he would have to rely on his parents even more. The last thing he wanted was another reason to be tangled up in the already troubled relationship of his parents.

It seemed like people had yet to notice that "King Steve" was no longer around, that it really was just Steve now. Not that he minded really. He figured that with it being his last year he wasn't going to see these people anymore, except for maybe Nancy and Tommy. Before it didn't seem like such a big deal what people thought of him anymore.

But now it was the biggest deal there ever was in the history of Hawkins High School.

The whole situation both mildly amused him and put him on edge. He just wasn't sure which one was bothering him the most.

Steve was so swept up in his thoughts that the day had flown by, his classes becoming a giant blurring mess. He found himself walking to his last class for the day, an honors course in calculus. He was still sure that Nancy was the one who was able to get him into the class in the first place, saying that "It'll look really good on your high school transcript." Steve didn't question it, though it was only several weeks in and he was already regretting it.

He walked into class, finding that he was a couple of minutes early than he meant to be. There were only a few students sitting in their desks, none of which that he talked to much, so he made his way

over to his desk and sat down. Students slowly trickled in, their voices a low murmur as soon as they noticed Steve was in their general vicinity. The more he took notice of those things, the more annoyed he became. So instead of talking to anyone, he stared outside the classroom window, silently grateful that his assigned seat was right next to it.

He must have zoned out, because the next thing he heard was his teacher saying, "Class, we have a new student to introduce."

Steve snapped to attention, whipping his head around to find none other than Billy standing at the front of the class, his hands shoved deep in his jacket pockets. He looked annoyed at having to stand in the front of everyone. Steve figured it was because he had to do this in all his other classes.

An odd thought struck Steve at that moment. *Billy Hargrove was in an honors calculus class?*

"All the way from California no less," the teacher went on. "Everyone, please welcome Billy."

There was a low rumble from the class, which caused Billy to roll his eyes as if he was uninterested in the whole ordeal. The sight of it didn't sit right with Steve. *This* is how the new student was acting? Like he didn't even care about being here?

Steve had to reel in the thought of how he had acted the same way his junior year. There was no way that this guy and himself were relatable whatsoever.

"Billy, you can sit in the seat behind Steve," she gestured to the empty seat behind Steve, it was the very last one in the whole row. Billy only half nodded, suddenly more interested in the person who was going to be sitting in front of him for the rest of the school year.

It was in that moment that it occurred to Steve that people had probably mentioned him to Billy, mentioned that he was the "king" of these halls. Steve regretted not publicly giving up the title sooner, because he could see the moment where Billy put two and two together, his lips turning up into a smirk.

He stalked over to Steve's seat, the smile refusing to fall from his face. Steve didn't realize that he was holding his breath until Billy passed him, sliding into his newly appointed desk without another word. Steve made it his mission to not turn around during the class period, or to even acknowledge Billy's presence. It would be better for the both of them to have as little of interaction as humanly possible Steve thought, glancing outside yet again as the teacher began class as usual.

Turns out minding your own business was a lot harder than he'd realize.

At some point during the hour, Billy had stretched out his legs under Steve's desk. The boots he wore hit the underside of Steve's desk, causing him to startle a bit. He resisted the urge to shoot the guy a glare when he heard him snickering quietly. All throughout class it remained the same way, Billy occasionally hitting his desk, sometimes his foot if it proved to be in Billy's way. When the bell rang to dismiss the students for the day, Steve was more than relieved. But before he could get up to leave, Billy beat him to the punch. The junior stood quickly, taking the few short steps to Steve's desk and planting a hand down onto the top of the desk. His body blocked Steve from getting up, and he had a feeling that even if he wanted to push Billy out of the way it wouldn't work out in his favor.

Up close, Steve could easily see that the kid was all pure muscle. He could smell the subtle hint of cigarette smoke lingering on his clothes, and Steve couldn't help but wonder if he'd skipped out on a class to go smoke. He took notice of the jewelry Billy wore too, the silver necklace and earrings somehow making him look even more intimidating.

Neither of them went to move, the silent face off rooting them in place. If other students were watching them they didn't notice nor care.

"So," Billy started, leaning down to get into Steve's personal space, "You're the King of Hawkins High School."

Steve glared, finding that the first thing he would ever say to Billy was, "Don't call me that."

Billy moved then, lifting his arms in the air with his palms out, mocking surrender, "Whatever you say, queenie."

"Don't call me that either," Steve said stiffly, taking his chance to stand up finally. Billy apparently held no concern for personal space. When Steve rose to his full height, he was standing so close that Steve noticed he was slightly taller than himself. Without another word, Steve stepped around the guy, making a beeline to the door. He didn't stop walking until he made it to his locker, quickly shoving his homework and books into his backpack. When he shut the locker door, he nearly dropped his bag.

"Jesus, Nance, don't jump a guy like that!" Steve managed, startled when Nancy suddenly appeared behind his locker.

She looked at him quizzically, a slight tilt to her head, "Are you alright?"

"Yeah? Why wouldn't I be?" Steve wasn't being defensive he told himself.

Nancy had a look of concern then, moving her hand to rest her palm against his cheek, "Your face is completely red. Are you getting sick?"

His face was red? Steve used his own hand to feel, and sure enough he felt the heat that radiated from his cheeks. Why was his face red?

"I uh, ran over here," he said, which wasn't untrue. "That guy from earlier - "

"Billy Hargrove?" Nancy supplied, not much to Steve's surprise.

"Yeah. He's in my honors calculus class."

Nancy nodded slowly, "He's in one of my honors classes too."

Steve did his best to not look surprised. Billy just didn't seem like the kind of person to be in *any* honors classes really. Instead of saying anything on it, Steve muttered something akin to "Interesting" under his breath.

Because that's what Billy Hargrove proved to be today. *Interesting.*

Steve tried not to think about it anymore, slinging his free arm over Nancy's shoulder and asking her what time to pick her up tonight.

2. Driver

Summary for the Chapter:

The car came to a screeching halt, the sound grating on Steve's ears as the stench of burning rubber reached his nostrils. He whipped his head up to find that the car had stopped mere inches away from the person, and as his eyes adjusted, he sucked in an involuntary breath.

In front of his car was none other than Billy *fucking* Hargrove, his own eyes wide as saucers and his cigarette half hanging out of his mouth.

Notes for the Chapter:

I really should be studying for my finals, y'all. But here I am working on this instead of school work.

I'm using some creative liberties to fill in the gaps of time between various scenes, as well as moving around some to fit the narrative a little better. Despite that, everything is, again, pretty much canon. Thank you all who have read, left kudos and comments on this work! It means a great deal to me that people are enjoying this story so far. As always, your inputs are always appreciated and welcomed! Semi-beta'd, however again all mistakes are my own.

Good luck to anyone else struggling with their finals
@.@

- Dave

Chapter title: "Driver" - Billy Raffoul

STEVE SAT IN his car for a long time, wearily eyeing the Wheeler's house. Not twenty minutes before, he had walked Nancy to her front door.

Much to her request, Steve found himself having dinner with Mr and Mrs Holland earlier. The shock of the Hollands selling their entire livelihood in order to find Barb's "murderer" rested uneasily with him during most of the dinner. Despite that, Steve did his best to carry on the conversation with the couple throughout the evening. However, when Nancy excused herself to the restroom, Steve immediately knew that something was wrong. And when ten minutes had passed and still no Nance, Steve too excused himself to check on her.

That was how he found her sitting on the edge of the bathtub, her head in her hands as sobs racked throughout her body.

Steve had quickly rushed Nancy out of the house, making up a story to the poor Hollands about her being sick from the food. He helped her into his car, and the pair drove off soon after. The sound of her hiccuped breathing filled their silence. It would have been enough for him to ask her what was wrong, but he would be stupid if he didn't already know.

It was Barb. It was always about Barb.

Steve hadn't press for a conversation. He already knew the guilt Nancy felt about Barb's death, the guilt from not being able to tell her parents what truly happened to their beloved daughter. Steve was never really close with Barb, but he knew that before he was in the picture she and Nancy were best friends. He felt partially responsible for how everything played out, and he had shared his feelings about it with Nancy before. What hurt most though was knowing that they couldn't really do anything about it at this point.

When he parked outside her house, Steve walked her to the doorstep, gave her a kiss goodbye, told her he loved her and to get some sleep.

He remained sitting in his car for a little while longer, his forehead resting on the steering wheel. He was tired. Beyond tired. The entire day had just been one giant sideshow, and he wanted nothing more than to just curl up in his bed and sleep it all away. He sighed, raising his head just enough so he could start the car back up again. After mustering up enough motivation, Steve turned on his headlights and began the journey back to his house. He didn't mess with the radio,

driving in relative silence, lost in his thoughts as he tapped his fingers on the wheel.

He recounted the events from almost a year ago, all of it seeming so fresh in his mind still. If someone would have told him that he would have to face off against an otherworldly creature hellbent on destroying Hawkins, a top secret organization that experimented on people, and running into one of those people, he would have laughed in their face.

But now, now he knew better. The paranoia of having another lecherous multi-mouthed walking predator was enough for him to keep a spare nail ridden baseball bat tucked away snugly in his trunk.

Sometimes... sometimes he felt as though he was waiting for something to happen again. He'd have moments where things just didn't seem right. Flickers of a world he didn't recognize kept him up at night. Shadows of the forest seemed to shift, like someone, *something*, was lurking out there, like something was going to jump out from those shadows and attack -

Steve's eyes widened wildly, the sudden realization donning on him that just a couple yards away *was a person walking*. He slammed hard on the brakes, feeling his whole body lurching forward.

The car came to a screeching halt, the sound grating on Steve's ears as the stench of burning rubber reached his nostrils. He whipped his head up to find that the car had stopped mere inches away from the person, and as his eyes adjusted, he sucked in an involuntary breath.

In front of his car was none other than Billy *fucking* Hargrove, his own eyes wide as saucers and his cigarette half hanging out of his mouth. The flood of the headlights made him seem paler than he already was.

And when Billy suddenly fell backwards out of view, Steve scrambled out of the driver's seat. He found Billy planted on the ground, his hands bracing him up from behind. His breathing was deep but even. Steve knelt down next to him, moving to help the younger man up, but he was rewarded with a glare so severe that it left Steve frozen in

his tracks.

“You wanna tell me what the *fuck* that was, Harrington?” Billy gritted out dangerously.

Steve faltered for a moment, unsure of what to say, “I... I didn’t see you walking across. I wasn’t paying attention.”

“Yeah, no shit,” Billy spat, his cigarette falling from his lips abandoned. Steve watched as Billy hoisted himself up slowly, patting the back of his jeans. Billy was stamping out his cigarette when Steve made it to his feet.

“The hell you doing out here so late?” Billy eyed him.

Steve felt himself becoming defensive on instinct, “I should be the one asking you that.”

The next thing he knew, Billy had him by the collar, lifting Steve an inch off the ground. Steve couldn’t help but notice their proximity to each other, their noses just barely touching. “I don’t owe you fucking shit, pretty boy,” Billy growled deeply, causing a shiver to run down Steve’s spine. “Especially since you tried to fucking kill me just now.” He shoved Steve away roughly, the older boy falling back hard on the pavement.

It took a moment for him to recover, but when he did Steve was greeted by the sight of Billy standing over him. Half of his body was illuminated by the headlights, and there was a strange look on his face that Steve couldn’t quite read. For a second, Billy’s face looked pained, was that guilt? Regret? When Billy noticed Steve’s staring his face shifted to something more cold. hostile. The junior didn’t say anything as he turned to walk away.

“H-hey!” Steve called after him, finding himself trying to stand quickly to catch up to Billy. “Where are you going?”

Billy didn’t turn around, “Home. The hell you think?”

Steve managed to get close enough to plant a hand on Billy’s shoulder, only to have it violently shrugged off. Billy faced him then, jabbing a finger into Steve’s chest and baring his teeth, “Don’t even

touch me, Harrington, or I swear to God I'll punch your lights out."

Steve got the feeling that he meant it too, taking a step back, "At least let me drive you home."

"Why should I?" Billy questioned, folding his arms over his denim jacket.

"Because... it's late," Steve said dumbly before adding, "And because I almost hit you."

"Killed me," he corrected.

"Fine! Jesus. Because I almost killed you. At least let me make up for it and drive you home."

"So you can be a creepy stalker and know where I live? In your dreams, queenie."

"Hey man, I'm just trying to help you out - "

"Well save it. I don't fuckin' need it," Billy growled. Steve didn't follow as Billy walked away for good this time. Steve could feel his irritation rising, and, unknowingly to Billy, he flipped him off before walking back to his car.

It was when Steve slammed his car door shut did he realize that he had managed to thoroughly piss off Billy Hargrove. He cursed under his breath, banging his fist on the steering wheel.

Fuck .

STEVE WOKE WITH a sharp gasp, lurching forward from his bed.

Sweat was beaded along his forehead, his covers tangled around his legs and torso. The early morning sunlight barely illuminated his room, but it was just dark enough for Steve to hastily turn on the lamp on his night stand. With shaking breath, Steve peered around his bedroom, checking to make sure that everything was still in place, that everything was fine, that he himself was *fine* .

He waited until his breathing was calm enough to really move. His legs felt like lead as he swung them over the side of the bed. He used a weak hand to grip the side of the night stand, attempting to steady himself. When he shut his eyes, he saw the flashes of bright Christmas lights, the horrified look on Nancy's face, the monster coming straight at him - the remnants of his nightmare were enough to make him puke on the spot. Steve barely held himself together, he had to, not only for his sake but for Nancy's too.

But it was hard to move on, to pretend like nothing happened, to pretend that they were just normal teenagers. The trauma of it all still weighed heavily on his shoulders, and he knew it did for everyone else. And some more so than others. However, Steve was determined to keep himself cool as best he could, to at least try to go back to being just a guy in high school.

Because it was all he really could do without driving himself insane.

Steve's gaze found the alarm clock, bleary eyes reading the bright red numbers. It was still fairly early, but he knew there was no chance in hell he was going to go back to sleep. So instead, he slowly stood, using his grip on the night stand for support.

The morning went by slowly. Steve got ready for school, dressing best as he could manage, making a weak attempt to stomach some cereal. He spent a great deal of time in the bathroom, trying several times getting his hair to look just right and trying desperately to wash away the grime and sweat his nightmare caused him. He frowned at the sight of the bags forming under his eyes and vowed to get a full night's sleep for once.

His house of course was quiet. Both his parents were away again for the week on whatever business they were doing. Usually he would cherish these mornings, filling the house with his loud music without

a care in the world, but today he just wanted nothing more than to get out of the forsaken place.

Steve left not too long after. It was still pretty early, but he didn't mind it much. By the time he reached school, the sun was shining brightly. The parking lot wasn't terribly full, several cars were already parked, and small groups of people were hanging around and talking. He took the time to turn off the car, move the driver's seat back, and relax for at least a moment. His finger tapped rhythms into the denim of his jeans, his eyes fixed to a parking spot far away as his mind wandered aimlessly.

Concerned thoughts of Nance bothered him, reminding him that he should find her as soon as possible to check on her. He hadn't seen Jonathan around much, though Steve didn't really know for sure if he wanted to in the first place. Something told him that there was some unspoken thing going on between him and Nancy, he tried not to think about it too much. Minimal thoughts were spent on his classes, he knew they would be the same and boring as usual.

Am I forgetting something ? The question hit him suddenly, causing him to squint. *Surely there isn't -*

The thought was interrupted by a knocking on his window. A startled Steve tore his eyes away to find a soft smiling Nancy waving sheepishly at him. Steve's demeanor relaxed instantly at the sight of her, and he quickly gathered himself and stepped out of the car.

He enveloped her in a tight hug and kissed her on the top of her head, "Good mornin' beautiful."

There was a brief moment before Nancy reciprocated, hugging him back warmly, "Good morning. It's almost time to go, are you coming?"

Steve pulled away and looked around, noting that he'd been sitting in his car for longer than he'd thought. The parking lot was nearly full, and people were starting to file into the high school. He made for a quick grab of his backpack in the backseat and locked up the car. As he slugged his arm around Nancy's shoulder, he found himself turning back to catch a final glimpse of the empty parking spot he'd

been staring at.

He realized that a certain blue Camaro was missing.

THE SCHOOL DAY dragged along at a snail's pace like Steve figured it would. His first class went by without a hitch with the absence of a *certain individual* . Any thought of *him* was casted out of Steve's mind quickly. He finally remembered the events of last night, the irritation of it all was enough for Steve to be glad that the kid wasn't at school today. And any instances of himself asking why Billy wasn't there in the first place was casted out as well.

Midday found Steve wandering the halls of Hawkins High, his sunglasses perched comfortably over his eyes. Several people could see through his clever disguise, however they weren't his real target of the hour. He rounded a few more corners before he reaches the end of a hallway. He leaned against the wall, acting casually as students passed by, waiting for his chance to pounce.

He heard them before actually seeing them.

"... listening to the Talking Heads and reading Vonnegut or something."

"Sounds like a nice night."

Steve watches Nancy and Jonathan pass, neither of them noticing him.

"Jonathan, just come. I mean, who knows, you might even, like, meet someone - " Steve chooses to close in then, moving around the corner. He stealthily comes up from behind Nancy, and in one swift movement he wraps his arms around her waist and hoists her up high. Nancy lets out a shriek, the pair falling back against the lockers. The commotion causes people to stare, though they don't even notice as Steve sets Nancy back down on the ground.

"Oh, my God!" she gasps, hitting her books against his chest. "Take

those stupid things off.”

Steve smiles broadly, removing the offending sunglasses from his face, “I missed you.”

“It’s been like an hour!”

“Tell me about it.” Steve uses their closeness to his advantage, pulling Nancy in for a long kiss. His face tingles where he feels her hand hold him. The semi-private moment between them is only interrupted when Nancy pulls away, “Okay, okay.”

He gives her a goofy grin, “Sorry.”

Nancy rolls her eyes, going to open her locker. Her glance behind her doesn’t go unnoticed by Steve as he puts on his sunglasses again, but he doesn’t say anything about it, tries not to think about it. It’s fine, their fine. He’s fine.

Instead, he moves to sneakily take the orange sheet that she was holding. “What’s this? ‘Come get sheet faced?’”

“Tina’s having a Halloween party at her place Wednesday night,” she supplies, putting some of her books away only to grab another set.

“A Halloween party, huh?” Steve reads and rereads the sheet. “Sounds like just what the doctor ordered.”

Nancy closes her locker, “What doctor?”

With a grin, Steve points at himself with his thumb, “This doctor right here. The doctor of good times.”

“All I see is a sleazy guy wearing sunglasses inside,” Nancy chuckles, playfully nudging his shoulder with hers. He nudges her back, moving away from the lockers to follow her to her next class, “Admit it, you love this sleazy guy.”

“Uh-huh,” she says unconvincingly.

Steve laughs it off, their conversation spiraling off into couples costumes ideas for the party. They make it to Nancy’s next class with

a couple minutes to spare, so they talk just outside the classroom door. Their conversation stills however when Steve peaks into the classroom, his voice dying mid sentence. Nancy gives him a quizzical look when he asks her what class she has now.

“Honors physics, why?” she asks, leaning to peer inside the classroom as well. It doesn’t take long for her eyes to land on where Steve’s interest was. He was staring at Billy, who had his hands shoved in his jacket pockets and glaring slightly out the classroom window. He was dressed in laced boots, ripped jeans and a black button down. At first she didn’t see anything abnormal, until she looked at Billy’s face. Deep blue and purple seemed to engulf his left eye in a massive bruise. It was only slightly swollen though, as if it was left there some time ago.

“That bruise wasn’t there last night...” Steve muttered out loud absentmindedly.

Nancy turned to him, even more confused, “Last night?”

Steve cursed at himself for having brought it up, “Yeah... after I dropped you off, I was driving home and I almost hit him.”

“ *You almost hit him with your car?* ” Nancy hissed under her breath, hitting him on the arm.

“It was an accident Nance!” he tried to convince her, wincing a little at the blow. “I wasn’t looking and he walked out into the middle of the road like a dumbass.”

He chanced another look at the junior, unable to keep his eyes off the bruise, “I definitely don’t remember him looking like *that* .”

“Maybe he got into a fight on the way home?” she suggests with a shrug.

Steve nodded slowly, “Maybe... you don’t sit next to him do you?”

“No, my desk’s on the opposite side of the room.”

“Good.” He gives her one more kiss before ushering her inside, telling her that he’ll meet her when school’s out. The act caught the eye of

the junior across the room, but Steve left quickly after, not wanting to start something during school with him.

He couldn't help but wonder about that bruise, no matter how many times he tried to cast the thought out.

3. Thriller

Summary for the Chapter:

And Steve sure as hell didn't expect Billy to lean in closer, for his eyelids to flicker across Steve's face only to land on his lips, for the smoke trickling from his lips to slowly fill Steve's nose.

"You don't get it do you Harrington?," Billy breathes slowly, heavily. "I told you, *they're* not my type."

Notes for the Chapter:

Fuck finals and fuck college @.@

Things get set in motion in this chapter y'all! Pretty exciting stuffs. I think with the break coming up I'll start updating at least twice a week, but nothing is set in stone yet.

Thank you all for reading, as well as the kudos and comments! Happy reading!

-Dave

Chapter Title: "Thriller" - Michael Jackson

NANCY WAS THE one to tell him to get a move on. He hadn't realized that he was spacing out, his fingers tapping on the steering wheel mindlessly. He only had to blink a couple of times for everything to register again. They'd just parked his car a couple houses down from Tina's. The amount of cars that lined the street was only one of the numerous indications of just how crazy her Halloween party was. From the car they could feel the thunder of the loud music and hear the roars of underaged drinkers.

Steve was slow to get out of the car. Nancy was waiting for him on the sidewalk, her arms crossed due to the cold weather. And possibly her upset demeanour.

“But listen... there’s nothing we can do about it...”

This isn’t some game, Nance... if they found out... they could put us in jail... they could destroy our families...

Let’s just go to Tina’s stupid party... and just pretend like we’re stupid teenagers... can we just do that... just for tonight?”

His own words still echoed in his head, the whole conversation still causing him to cringe. He knew he wasn’t wrong, there really wasn’t anything that they could do. Even just talking about it in the open could be enough for them to be suddenly taken away and never be heard from again.

Steve had tried several times to convince Nancy of this, to act just like normal teenagers living normal lives with their normal friends and families. And he knew that it felt damn near impossible to do. But they had to try.

If they didn’t, they both wouldn’t be able to carry on at all.

He remembered the crushed look on Nancy’s face when they were talking earlier. He hated that look. That look of defeat. It made his own chest tighten with guilt and anguish. Traces of that look were on her face now as he walked up to her, draping his arm over her shoulders.

“You ready to par-tay?” he asked her lightheartedly, attempting to lift her sour spirits.

Nancy nodded, “It sounds like it’s already in full swing.”

He laughed softly, “You’d be right about that.”

They approached what could easily be determined as Tina’s house. There were red solo cups littered all around the front yard, as well as various mysterious pieces of garments scattered about. All the window curtains were drawn closed, but various colors flooded through the thin fabrics. The noise had only grown louder and louder, and Steve could already tell that this was going to be the party of the year.

He found his eyes being drawn to the cars that lined the street. All of them seemed unassuming enough, however the sight of a certain Camaro was enough to make him tense up. Nancy must have felt it, because she rested a gentle hand over his bicep.

“Everything alright?”

He didn’t say anything. Instead, he took the opportunity to slip on his sunglasses with his free hand. He gave her a cheesy smile, and the way she rolled her eyes made him a little more hopeful.

As soon as they opened the front door, they were blasted with a wave of body heat. The house was packed to the brim, people covered every square inch of the living room, dining room and kitchen. From where they entered, they could see the double glass doors that led to a massive backyard, where many more people were gathered and shouting. The commotion of what was going on back there was all too familiar to Steve. Had it been a year prior, he would be right out there with them all, getting wasted on cheap beers and causing a scene.

Instead, Steve flashed Nancy another smile before grabbing her hand and pulling her into the crowd to dance.

The music consumed them graciously, heavy rhythms shaking their bones as they became one with the crowd. And for a moment, they really were just stupid teenagers, succumbing to the levels of just normal parties, breathing as if it were their last. They lost themselves in each other and to the music, uncaring of just how much time had passed, uncaring of the other stupid teenagers around them, uncaring of the consequences they could face the next day.

For a moment, just a moment, they didn’t think of anything but themselves.

But of course, the haze only lasted but a moment. The chanting from the backyard seemed to grow louder and louder, loud enough for Steve to recognize just what they were exactly saying.

“Billy! Billy! Billy! Billy!”

The name alone was enough to make Steve stop dancing, enough to make him tap on Nancy's shoulder and thumb over his, gesturing towards the back wall. Maybe if he moved, he'd be out of Billy's line of sight.

The last time he had actually seen Billy was during Nancy's class the other day. Billy skipped out on math again earlier, and Steve hadn't seen his car or the red headed girl he brought with him.

"THAT'S HOW YOU DO IT, HAWKINS!"

Billy's own voice rang louder than the music itself, and any other time Steve would be mildly impressed.

The pair moved away from the dancing crowd. Nancy was about to ask why they had moved, but the question died in her throat when both she and Steve noticed Tommy sauntering over to them with Billy in tow.

And, unfortunately, Steve couldn't take his eyes off the junior. He drenched head to toe in sweat and alcohol, doning near skin tight jeans and only a thick leather jacket that perfectly showed off every inch of toned muscle he had. Steve had half a mind to think how unfair it was to have a body like that, while the other half was noticing the death glare that Billy was currently giving him.

Tommy taunted him, "We got ourselves a new Keg King, Harrington."

Steve's eye twitched. His falling out with Tommy last year was to be expected, as well as the shit attitude he gave him anytime he was in Steve's general vicinity. What Steve hadn't expected was for Tommy to leech himself onto Billy like he did. Why did it take Steve so long to realize that the guy was only into him for the popularity all those years ago?

Another guy stepped forward, backing Billy on the shoulder as he yelled in Steve's face, "Yeah, that's right. Eat it, Harrington!"

Steve wanted to challenge Billy, to tell him and his goons to fuck off, but he noticed out of the corner of his eye that Nancy was no longer by his side. Rather than picking a fight with the junior, Steve decided

to follow wherever Nancy had gone. He gave them all a hard glare before walking off, thankfully with his dignity as much intact as it possibly could be.

He found Nancy in the kitchen, red solo cup in hand and scooping it in a giant punch bowl. Steve immediately went to take the cup away from her, "Whoa, whoa, whoa! Take it easy, Nance!"

She moved the cup out his grasp, taking another scoop of the mysterious and obviously spiked drink, "We're just being stupid teenagers for the night. Wasn't that the deal?"

Steve paused, the words stinging him more than they should. She kept eye contact with him as she guzzled down the drink before going for another. Nancy maneuvered her way back to the crowd, sipping her drink as she went. Steve couldn't help the uneasy feeling that was rising in his stomach.

The next hour carried on without incident. The music became hazier. The dancing became dirtier. The people became drunker; Nancy became drunker. Steve would see her sneak off to get more to drink, and each time she came back she was just a little more disheveled than she was before. He made sure to not drink too much, his concern for her trumping any buzz he had thought of getting earlier.

But Steve knew that at some point the drinking had got to give. And when he saw Nancy slip away once more, he decided that enough was enough. Any more and he knew it wouldn't end good.

Nancy pushed her way through the crowd, stumbling to the punch bowl like it was her new best friend. She barely was reaching over to scoop her cup into the bowl when Steve grabbed ahold of her.

"Hey! Hey, Nance, you've had enough okay?" He moved to grab the cup away from her.

She squirmed from his arms, leaning over the counter, "Screw you!"

"Nancy I'm serious okay? You're wasted right now."

She continued to ignore him, getting as much alcohol in her cup as she possibly could before trying to get away from him.

Steve stepped toward her, attempting to stop her from drinking anymore by holding her hands down. "Hey, Nancy, seriously stop. You've had enough."

Her words were slurred, but she kept on trying to fight him, "N-no, give it to me!"

"No, I'm serious you need to stop."

"Fuck off, Steve!"

"Put it down."

"No! Stop it, Steve! Stop - "

And then Steve lost his grip on her, falling back a step and watching helplessly as Nancy flung the whole cup onto her white shirt. The party seemed to stop briefly to stare at the both of them. Nancy looked up at Steve as if everything was his fault, "What the hell?"

Before he could say anything, Nancy was storming off through the crowd. He ran after her, unheard apologies falling from his lips.

Nancy stumbled into a bathroom, immediately going for a wash cloth. Steve followed her in, closing the door behind them. He watched her as she attempted to rid the shirt of the glaring red stain.

"That's not coming off, Nance."

"It's... it's coming off," she argued as she continued to scrub.

He sighed loudly, "C'mon, just let me take you home okay?"

She didn't answer him, too focused on her futile task.

"Let's go okay? I can take you home and you can get out of that shirt."

"You wanted this," she managed to say finally, going to wet the wash cloth again.

"No, I didn't want this," he said bewildered. "I told you to stop

drinking.”

He could tell she was fading fast, sliding lower and lower against the sink as she muttered, “It’s bullshit... all bullshit...”

“No, it’s not bullshit, Nance.”

“No,” she hiccuped, finally giving up on her shirt to face him head on, “You. Y-you’re bullshit.”

Steve was at a loss for words, “What are you even talking about-”

“You’re pretending... like everything’s okay. You know, like we didn’t like kill Barb. Like, it’s great. Like we’re in love and we’re partying. Y-yeah, let’s party, huh? *Party . Bullshit .* It’s all just bullshit.”

Steve could feel himself shutting down. He felt his chest constraining tightly, violently. His voice was weak when he spoke, afraid of what he was going to hear when he asked,

“You don’t love me?”

Nancy looked at him for a very long time, like he was the craziest person in the world. But when she finally spoke up, he felt his entire body being crushed.

“It’s bullshit.”

And that was it. Steve knew this was it. The events of the year prior was building up to this, all the fighting, the weeping, the nightmares, everything. It was all just *bullshit* .

He didn’t spare her another glance. He just couldn’t. He sidestepped her, opened the bathroom and left, slamming it behind him. He couldn’t look at her. He couldn’t be with her. She was going to *tear him apart* .

Steve made it back out to the living room, and he recognized an out of place face amongst the crowd. He made a beeline towards him, putting a firm hand on his back.

Jonathan turned around with a confused expression that softened at the sight of Steve. However it immediately hardened when he realized how tense Steve really was.

“Hey man, are you alright?” Jonathan asked him.

Steve ignored the question, “Nancy’s drunk off her ass in the bathroom. Take her home.”

He left without another word, knowing that Jonathan would take more than enough care of Nancy for him.

Looking around at the crowd, Steve had to find somewhere else to go. Somewhere than was more quiet. Somewhere where he could just sit down. He explored the other half of the house, stumbling upon a set of stairs that led to the upper level of the house. He took the steps two at a time, eager to just get away from everyone and everything. The upper floor was dark, and he could feel the vibrations from below. Most of the doors were closed, and Steve was hesitant to peek his head in. Who knew what kind of shit these people would be getting into.

Instead, he opted for a door at the very end of the hallway. It was slightly ajar to begin with, so he cautiously nudged it open with his shoulder. It looked to be the master bedroom. It was modestly furnished with a king sized bed pushed against the wall. There was a set of glass doors across the way that allowed for the moonlight to pour into the room.

Fresh air. He needed fresh air.

He strode across the room, the thought of getting outside dominating his head. He didn’t notice that these doors as well were slightly open as well as he pulled one of them open. Steve was greeted with a comforting cool breeze, and he sucked in a deep breath.

And when he turned to his left he nearly choked.

“Harrington,” Billy drawled, cigarette hanging between his teeth. He was leaning up against the wall, his arms crossed and leaning slightly over the protective rail.

Steve recovered quickly, trying to hide his cough, “Hargrove.”

They stared at each other for what seemed like forever. He took the moment to examine the juniors face. The bruising around his eye had seemingly toned down, but it was still very much noticeable. The question of what happened came back to him, but he didn’t dare speak. Steve felt like if he made the first move, Billy would surge toward him.

But instead, Billy just simply took a quick drag of his cigarette and held it between his fingers, “What are you doing up here?”

Something felt off about the current situation. Billy had just asked him a question. A normal and reasonable question. With no malice to his voice. What.

“I uh... needed some air,” Steve replied awkwardly, unsure of what to do with himself. Should he move away? Should he just leave?

“You look like you’re about to have a panic attack,” Billy told him simply, taking another drag.

“I can’t decide if you’re going to punch me now or later,” Steve told him honestly.

The comment earned a chuckle from Billy, the sound of it foreign to Steve’s ears. It was a nice sound.

“Not really in the mood for anything physical,” Billy reassured, moving back to look over the railing.

Steve couldn’t help but ask, “Are you... are you drunk?”

The junior looked back at him briefly before gesturing to come closer. Steve’s brows furrowed unsure, to which Billy just shrugged and turned back around. After a couple of seconds, Steve found his feet moving him towards where Billy was standing. He too peered over the railing, surprised to see a large group of people conversing and mingling outside calmly, unlike how they all were acting before.

“People back in California called me a ‘docile drunk’.”

The comment caught Steve off guard, turning to face Billy, “Really.”

He didn’t reply. Steve took it as his cue to shut the hell up, so he went back to people watching. They stood together in quiet for some time. Steve was unsure of just how much time had passed. He watched people come and go, and after a while it was almost as if the party was starting to die down a bit.

Steve took a chance to start up another conversation.

“So, Keg King huh?”

He didn’t need to look to know that Billy was smirking, “Jealous?”

“Can’t say that I am really.”

It earns another laugh from him, “It’s an awesome title you gotta admit.”

Steve gave in and nodded, “It’s kinda awesome. Just kinda though.”

“Damn straight,” he brought the cigarette to his lips again before asking, “Where’s your girlfriend at? You two were tied at the damn hip all night.”

An odd observation Steve noted, but it wasn’t a wrong one, “She went home. And I’m pretty sure we aren’t dating anymore after tonight.”

“Her loss,” Billy muttered casually.

The comment caught him off guard, but Steve didn’t look into it much. “What about you? You’re obviously a catch here, any of them catch your eye?”

Billy shakes his head, “No, no, no. They’re not my type.”

The answer was surprising to say the least, “Then what is your type?”

Billy takes another drag, smoke trailing out from his nose. He doesn’t answer.

The question hangs in the air and in Steve's mind for longer than it should, so he scans the crowd below, leaning over the railing. He points at a girl dressed as Wonder Woman, "How about her?"

Billy quirks an eyebrow at him, but he plays along as he leans further over the railing to find who Steve's pointing at. It takes all of two seconds for him to shake his head.

Steve's sights find another girl, "What about the cat girl over there?"

Billy doesn't even look this time, shaking his head again as he takes another puff. With a new tactic in mind, Steve searches for the skimpiest dressed girl he can find. As gross as it seems, surely Billy would find her attractive, "Ok, for sure her though, right?"

When Billy doesn't immediately deny it, Steve thinks he's won their little guessing game, though there's a strange tugging feeling that's keeping him from feeling happy that he might have guessed correctly.

But Steve wasn't expecting Billy to move away from the wall toward him, carelessly spitting his cigarette out for it to fall somewhere below. He wasn't expecting him to suddenly grab ahold of his wrist, or for him to start dragging him back into the dimly lit bedroom. He wasn't expecting Billy to turn around, to tug on his wrist, putting less than an inch of space between their bodies.

And Steve sure as hell didn't expect Billy to lean in closer, for his eyelids to flicker across Steve's face only to land on his lips, for the smoke trickling from his lips to slowly fill Steve's nose.

"You don't get it do you Harrington?," Billy breathes slowly, heavily. "I told you, *they're* not my type."

His eyes flicker back up to Steve's own, holding him down with just his glance alone.

Everything comes crashing down on Steve at once.

You don't get it do you Harrington? I told you, they're not my type.

I told you, they're not my type.

They're not my type.

They're not my type.

Steve felt all the air leave his lungs. He hadn't noticed his heart beat sky rocketing dangerously. He can't take his eyes off of Billy. He was afraid he would just suddenly disappear, as if this moment never did happen between them. His fingers itched to touch the younger man's face, to suddenly close the already closing gap. But he was rooted under Billy's glance helplessly. He couldn't move from where he stood. He realized that he didn't *want* to move.

And that scared the shit out of him.

What the hell was going on?

There's a sudden crashing sound from below, causing the teenagers to startle and jump apart. They both look down at the floor then back at each other. From below they can hearing cheering and chanting, and suddenly everyone's calling Billy's name, trying to find him. Steve can see just how heavily Billy was breathing, the look of surprise and near shock probably mimicking Steve's own.

He barely even has the chance to open his mouth before Billy is rushing towards him, grabbing the front of his shirt and violently yanking him lower.

"Don't you dare say a word about what happened tonight, do you understand me Harrington?"

The venom in those words were enough to make Steve's legs quake. He felt his voice leaving him, so instead he nods shakily.

Billy lets go of him and storms out without another word, leaving Steve to stand dumbfounded in the middle of the room.

What the hell was that?

The confusion Steve felt bubbling in his head, in his stomach, only got worse as the seconds passed.

What the hell was he doing?

He got caught up in the moment. That was all. Nothing more, nothing less. He needed to get out of here, he needed to get out of this godforsaken party, he needed to go *home*.

He tripped over his own feet as he hurriedly made his way downstairs. He made eye contact with no one, fearing that with just one glance everything would be exposed.

Had he turned around as he exited through the front door, he would have seen Billy Hargrove, newly appointed Keg King and undeniably King of Hawkins, staring after him with a grim expression of his own. He would have seen the way Billy Hargrove's face was just as flushed as his.

And he would have seen the turmoil and confusion that Billy Hargrove was going through too.

4. Firestone

Summary for the Chapter:

"It's just one of my addictions I guess."

"Well, we've all got one."

"Oh yeah? Then what's yours?"

"That's a good question... I guess I haven't found mine yet."

"That's a damn shame, Harrington," he breathed, letting smoke flow from his mouth gracefully.

Notes for the Chapter:

So I've been bedridden sick for the past five days? And all I've been doing really is sleeping. So my deepest apologies for getting this chapter out so late, it honestly just slipped my mind.

Also this chapter was a hard one to write for some reason, so I hope it doesn't show too much. Any choppiness or weirdnesses are of my own mistakes. Thank you all for the lovely comments, the kudos and just for reading in general! Once I get rid of this weird sickness funk, I'll be back into the swing of things.

- Dave

Chapter title: "Firestone" - Kygo ft. Conrad Sewell

STEVE FELT LIKE his skin was ablaze.

He couldn't help his panting, the aching that coursed through his veins, the sweat beading along his body like rain. Numb limbs refused to move, instead finding weak purchase on rumpled, wrinkled bed sheets. His torso was being held down by a strong hand, unfamiliar fingers splayed out on

his bare flesh. The hand's partner was trailing down Steve's inner thigh delicately.

And when soft lips caressed his hip bone, whispering soundless worships on the sensitive spot, Steve let his head fall back and allowed the strangled groan to escape him.

Off in the distance, an almost inaudible ringing sounded off.

Steve kept his eyes closed, he couldn't find the energy to keep them open. His whole world was succumbed in a darkness he couldn't see through. But his senses kept him grounded. He sensed the person hovering over him shifting their weight steadily upwards. Cool skin dragged against his own hot skin, the motion causing Steve's breath to hasten.

The ringing in his ears continued as he felt a hand cup the side of his face gently. Smooth, heavily breathing against his ear had him gasping sharply, had him shaking.

Deep, throaty words were his undoing as everything came crashing down on him.

"I told you, Harrington, they're not my type. You are."

Steve's eyes fly open, failing to suppress his struggled gasp as he shot upright in his bed. He immediately regretted the sudden movement, moving to hold his head in his hands as a throbbing headache overcame him. His alarm clock screamed at him, telling him that it was time to start getting ready for school.

His mind was swimming dangerously. Bits and pieces of his dream invaded his memory, senses and feelings of pure *heat* were still lingering on his goosebump ridden skin. He felt like he was hyper aware of his body, the weird aches and pains of having slept roughly through the night, the stiffness of his limbs, the jitteriness of his fingers.

He made quick work of shutting the alarm clock up, the silence of the house bringing some relief to his poor head.

... I told you, Harrington...

Steve slipped back into his bed, burying himself underneath his blankets, curling in on himself as he tried to even out his breathing.

... they're not my type...

He blinked slowly, his eyes adjusting slow to the now dimmed light. His head was pounding.

Was he losing his mind?

... you are ...

He tried his best to shut out the voice that played on repeat, the involuntarily shiver that coursed through him was a reminder of everything that happened. Of Tina's stupid party. Of Nancy's bullshit drinking. Of Jonathan's sudden appearance.

Of Billy Hargrove acting in a friendly-ish way towards him. An almost too friendly-ish way.

Steve couldn't tell if the ghost of Billy's breath came from his... his *dream*, or if it came from whatever the hell happened last night between them. A part of him felt like none of it happened, like it was all apart of his dream. But he could still smell the smoke of Billy's cigarette on him, on his clothes. His bedsheets were ridden with the scent that reminded him of the junior.

He had to stop himself from inhaling the smell deeply.

The question of just what exactly in hell is going on circulated in his mind. Because truthfully, Steve really didn't know what was going on with himself. Just mere days ago, Steve was his normal self, or at least as normal as he could be, hanging out with Nancy like usual and trying to keep his presence as minimal as possible. But now, now with Billy Hargrove in the picture, he found himself without a girlfriend, his old reputation now stacked against a new oppressor, all the while his grasp on his own self slowly slipping into something else entirely.

He didn't know what to call it, but any time he was remotely close to

Billy, he felt like something was off, like something just wasn't right. But what scared him was that it didn't feel *wrong* . It was just a small feeling he had buried underneath all the irritation and agitation he projected towards the junior.

Maybe he thought it was supposed to feel wrong? But how could he possibly know? The only comparable feeling was when he first noticed Nancy years ago as an incoming freshman. It was just a little spark of a feeling back then, but that spark soon had him introducing himself to her, wanting him to get to know her better, wanting him to be with her. That spark was a wonderful feeling, amazing even.

But with Billy, it was just different. It was a different spark that he couldn't figure out. Was it supposed to feel wrong?

Or was it supposed to feel right?

And a sudden, horrifying thought struck him. When he'd talked to Nancy about that strange little feeling, she had said she felt the same way.

Was Billy feeling the same thing? The same wrong-right, indescribable feeling? Or was it all made up in Steve's head?

... *I told you, Harrington* ...

He got the feeling that maybe it wasn't all in his head. But like hell would he try to figure out if he was right or not. His jumbled thoughts were only making his headache worse.

Sighing, Steve shuffled his way from under the blankets to greet the day again.

IT WAS WHEN Steve pulled into the parking lot did it occur to him that he was supposed to pick up Nancy for school. They'd worked out an agreement where he would pick her up on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays since she still didn't have a car yet. And usually on any other day he would pick her up dutifully on time, would wait for her outside the car and would hold open the door for her like the good boyfriend he was.

He chuckled.

Like the *good boyfriend he used to be* .

After her little stint last night, Steve was pretty sure that they no longer were together. At least as long as he was concerned, because apparently it all was just "bullshit" to her. Part of him wondered if he would run into her today, and the schedule he once rued due to them not sharing any classes together actually seemed like a blessing.

He'd be lying if he said he wasn't bitter on the matter, so it probably would do some good to put some space between the both of them. He didn't know what he would even say if he saw her, let alone talk to her. It'd probably take everything in his power to not say something he'd regret later.

Because whether she felt it or not, Steve still loved her deeply, and he didn't think it could just go away in the span of one evening.

Instead of dwelling on it all much more, he pulled himself out of his car and put on a brave face. He knew he would hear people talking about what happened. They were, after all, the "perfect" couple of Hawkins High. Used to be he reminded himself. They used to be. He was grabbing his things when he noticed a now all too familiar blue Camaro parked not too far away.

He couldn't help but stare at the car. It's infamous driver wasn't in it, and neither was the red headed girl he dropped off. It was odd. It was still fairly early, and not many people were at school just yet. He shook his head, telling himself that it didn't matter really, the guy can show up whenever he wanted to show up.

Whatever.

He shrugged it off, shutting his car door a little too hard and making his way to Hawkin's front entrance.

The hallways were mostly, and thankfully, empty. Steve passed by several smaller friend groups, but he noticed the way they looked at him as he passed. Looks full of pity, but they lacked any empathy. It didn't take long for news to travel in this high school. He expected it really, but that didn't mean he was anywhere near ready to face it. He made sure that at least on the outside it seemed like he didn't care.

He made it quickly to his locker, shoving his things inside of it a little carelessly. He stood there for a moment, surveying his options. He could go to his first class early and hang out there like a loser, or he could go back to his car and run the risk of possibly seeing Nancy... or...

Steve shut the locker door, it's rattling echoing in the hallway. He didn't spare a chance to see if the noise garnered anyone's attention, rather he set off in the direction of the gym. The trip was thankfully a short one.

Next to the gym was a dead end hallway full of old storage lockers and used sports equipment. However, just a little passed all the junk was a boys bathroom that rarely ever got used. The bathroom itself was perfectly fine, however it's placement was a poor one, and students often forget that it's even there to begin with.

Steve found himself standing in front of that bathroom door, a plan in his mind already forming to sit and relax in the frosted window sill that was situated on the other side.

Harsh fluorescent light hit his eyes before the smoke did. He erupted into a coughing fit, using his arm to cover his mouth, and the voice he'd secretly been dreading to hear spoke from across the way.

"You alright there, Harrington? You sound like you're dying."

Steve glared up at Billy, willing his coughing to go away. The boy was leaning against the window pane, his long legs dangling over the edge of the sill and a cigarette hanging from his lips.

"I'm fine," Steve lied through his teeth, waving the smoke away from his face. "What are you going in here?"

"Takin' a smoke break," Billy said simply, reiterating the fact as he pulled the cigarette from his mouth and flicked it into the nearest sink.

"It's like seven in the morning," Steve said, looking at him disbelievingly.

Billy smirked at the comment. The sight made Steve's heart skip.

The junior stared down the senior almost challengingly, and it occurred to Steve that Billy was waiting for him to make the first move. Would he leave the bathroom and avoid any trouble, or would he stay?

Steve must've not been thinking right, because he found himself moving towards the junior instead of turning around. He didn't sit next to Billy, deciding to lean against the edge of the sink next to the one that became Billy's over sized ashtray.

The sound of clothes rustling caught Steve's attention, and he looked up to catch Billy pulling out a pack from his back jeans pocket. Billy fiddled the thing in his hands, perhaps wondering if he should smoke another.

"When did you start smoking?" Steve found himself genuinely inquiring, his eyes unmoving from the box.

Billy gave him a strange little look, but answered the question calmly, "Several years ago."

Steve nodded, casting his gaze down at his feet.

Billy quirked an eyebrow, "Not gonna ask why?"

"Nah," Steve replied, shoving his hands in his pockets. "I'm sure you've got your reasons, and you don't owe me an explanation."

"Damn right," Billy was quick to say, but Steve took notice of the lack of malice behind the words.

“Though I will say that smoking is bad for your health,” Steve pointed out, only slightly joking.

Billy chuckled again, choosing that moment to lean forward with his elbows on his knees instead of leaning on the frosted pane. “It’s just one of my addictions I guess,” he said, agile fingers moving to slip a cigarette from the box. He reached to grab the black lighter resting next to him, sliding the new cigarette into his mouth.

Steve watched him curiously, “Well, we’ve all got one.”

“Oh yeah?” Billy mumbled as he worked, “Then what’s yours?”

The sound of the lighter hitting the floor and Billy lightly cursing at himself made Steve pause in his answer. Without much thought, Steve moved to pick up the fallen lighter. He took the couple steps towards Billy, closing the already small gap between them.

“That’s a good question,” he said, mindlessly lighting Billy’s cigarette for him. “I guess I haven’t found mine yet.”

What he’d failed to notice was that moving closer had somehow situated him directly between Billy’s legs. However the reality of the situation hit him hard when Billy leaned in for him, using two fingers to hold his cigarette while Steve had lit it. And Billy didn’t lean back, the several inches between them now a constant as he took a deep pull.

“That’s a damn shame, Harrington,” he breathed, letting smoke flow from his mouth gracefully.

The action had Steve memorized, his eyes locked on the juniors lips, “Is it though?”

Billy took the cigarette out of his mouth then, his eyes finding Steve’s, a lopsided grin forming on his own face.

Steve couldn’t tell who leaned in first, who tilted their head first, whose lips brushed whose first. But when he felt the barest of touches along his hip, Billy’s free hand just grazing his clothing, Steve felt like his brain was going to short circuit.

But it was the ringing of the school bell that startled them both at once, with Steve jumping back and Billy flinching backwards, knocking the back of his head on the window pane.

A gumbled and stuttered apology fell from Steve's lips, only to be drowned out by the bell ringing again. Before he even realized, Steve was rushing out of the bathroom. He couldn't bring himself to look behind him as the door closed. He didn't want Billy to see him, how the blood rushed to his face, how the blush was creeping over his features.

He was still clutching onto Billy's lighter in a vice grip.

STEVE FELT LIKE his day was spiraling into hell and he can't climb out of it.

He thought he'd gotten away from Billy, thought he'd escaped the embarrassment he felt earlier, thought he was in the clear.

And then him and his *stupid* lopsided grin sauntered into basketball practice like he owned the place. Like nothing ever happened at all between them yesterday. Like nothing even happened *this morning*. Steve couldn't blame him though, he was the one who ran out after all. And he knew he couldn't use the bell ringing as an excuse because it wasn't an excuse.

His excuse was that he was mentally freaking out about everything going on, but how can he possibly just explain it all to someone he barely even knows?

He must have zoned out, because the next thing he knew he was on his butt on the gym floor for the umpteenth time in this practice alone thanks to Billy. He could hear the coach yelling at him to get

up, and he slowly complied, rising onto his feet while trying to catch his breath.

Steve wouldn't call himself a star athlete by any means. Nancy had been the one who suggested for him to try out basketball in the first place. But he was usually better than this, he could at least get a couple shots in, a couple steals here and there, hell even some rebounds too.

But when coach assigned Billy to guard Steve, it was as if Steve was learning how to walk for the first time in his life. He kept tripping over his own feet, kept losing the ball, kept falling on his ass. Coach made sure to yell at him every single time he messed up, and all he could do was suck it up and try to make up for it.

Billy was strangely quiet towards him. He didn't try picking a fight with him, didn't make any smartass jokes like he did with the other players. But just because he was quiet didn't mean that the junior was going easy on him. He was especially rough with Steve, knocking into him hard, getting up in his personal space as if he were trying to make some unknown point that Steve just wasn't quite picking up on. Any feeling he'd gotten from Billy earlier seemed to have all evaporated back into that irritation he originally felt towards the younger man.

When Steve found himself on his ass once more, his coach yelling for him to get up, he heard his name being called from across the court. The whole game momentarily paused, Steve looking up to spot none other than Nancy with her own look of irritation on her face.

He cursed under his breath, standing quickly and hollering over to his coach to give him a minute. Steve casted one more look onto the court, his eyes catching Billy staring at him pensively. Billy quickly averted his gaze, moving instead to talk to another player.

Steve's brows furrowed together at the odd sight, but he didn't have much time to think about it, his thoughts swarming around the fact that *Nancy wanted to talk to him*. He followed her wordlessly out the gym.

"What are you doing here?" he asked her once they were out of

earshot from other students.

“What do you think?” Nancy asked incredulously. “Where were you this morning? I missed first period!”

Steve shrugged, “Figured Jonathan would take you.” He can tell she’s baffled by the comment, and he almost wished he hadn’t said it.

Almost.

“What... what are you talking about?” she questions.

“Jesus Nance, you can’t really handle your alcohol can you? You remember going to Tina’s party last night, right?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, then what?”

“I remember dancing and... spilling some punch. You got mad at me because I was drunk. And then you took me home.”

The false retelling of the story was enough to make Steve chuckle bitterly, “No, see, that’s where your mind gets a little fuzzy. That was your other boyfriend that was... that was Jonathan.”

“I don’t understand what - “

“It’s pretty simple, Nance,” he interrupts, “I’m just telling it like it is.”

The confusion increases on her face, “What? Telling what like it is?”

“Apparently, we killed Barb,” he began, “And I don’t care because I’m bullshit and our whole relationship is bullshit and everything is pretty much bullshit, bullshit, bullsht.”

He continues on before she can speak up, “And also, you don’t love me.”

“I was drunk Steve!” she tries to defend herself. “I don’t remember any of that.”

“So that makes everything that you said, that’s all bullshit too?”

“Yes!”

“Then tell me - “

“Tell you what?”

“You love me,” he finally gives in. “Tell me you love me.”

“Are you serious right now?” she asks in disbelief.

Steve doesn't say anything, waiting intently for the response he already knows he's going to hear. It still hurts him when she doesn't answer him immediately. How hard could it be to just say three little words?

He grows tired of waiting, he grows tired of just being there, “You know what. Forget it. This is all just bullshit anyway.” And he walks away from her, not caring enough in that moment to look back at her. He just can't take any more embarrassments today.

By the time he gets back inside the gym, the scrimmage is already over. The coach makes a public announcement welcoming him back, in which more than half the team snickers at. Steve just can't bring himself to care at this point, all he wants is to just go home already and get the hell away from everyone.

Practice ends soon after, and everyone's free to go enjoy the rest of their afternoon break. Steve forgoes showering in the locker room and instead grabs his things, making an excuse about going to see the nurse before heading out.

He feels the eyes of a certain someone on his back as he leaves, but he can't bring himself to care about that either.

Notes for the Chapter:

On a side note, should I get a tumblr? I've been debating this for awhile now but I can't seem to decide :\

5. Swimming in the Moonlight

Summary for the Chapter:

“Uh huh. You still didn’t answer my other question,” Steve tried again.

And for the smallest of seconds, Billy looked as if he were a deer caught in headlights. A strange look flashed across his features before one of composure landed.

“Turns out you’ve got the only lighter that I can easily track down,” he replied, hooking his thumbs on his jean belt loops.

Steve wondered if the junior was trying to play it cool.

Notes for the Chapter:

So this chapter is meant to be a little more on the fun side before the more hard hitting stuff kicks in. The other day it occurred to me that the events of season 2 take place generally over the span of a single week (excluding the jump of about a month at the end of episode 9), so I decided to revamp the entire story line of FFEYHO to accommodate for this. I did this mostly because it's just unrealistic and logistically impossible to cram the entire relationship progression between Billy and Steve from start to finish in just one week. My hope is that this revamp will be realistic not only in real life but also in the canon. I don't have an exact number of chapters, however I do know that this is going to be a very long narrative that will expand even further than the events at the end of season 2. So get ready folks, this is going to be a long ride.

On a side note, I have a tumblr now! My handle is

dave-starcross (creative, I know). There's not a whole lot on it yet and it's nothing special (except there's some fun snowflakes), but I will be posting little behind the scenes stuff about FFEYHO, as well as posting general updates and answering any questions you all may have about the story. Anyways, thank you all for reading, commenting and the kudos! It warms my tiny (and still ill) heart. Stay tuned for Chapter 6, which will be posted this Sunday!

- Dave

Chapter Title: "Swimming in the Moonlight" - Bad Suns

STEVE WASN'T SURE how to react really.

He should be feeling embarrassed, and part of him was. The ringing of his house's doorbell woke him up moments prior, and in his sleepy stupor he didn't think to put on regular clothes, answering the door in just his boxers. However, he was mostly just confused.

He couldn't find a legitimate reason for why Billy Hargrove would be standing in his doorway so late in the evening.

At first Steve didn't say anything, rather instead blinking owlshly at the junior before him.

Billy shoved his hands further into his jacket pockets, "Are you going to let me in, Harrington? It's cold as fuck out here if you couldn't tell."

Steve ran his hand over his face in a poor attempt to wipe away his tiredness as he stepped aside, allowing for Billy to come in. He shut the door behind Billy and reached over to flick on the light switch. Warm light flooded from overhead, illuminating them more than the simple lamp did. He turned just in time to catch Billy eyeing him up and down as he shrugged off his denim jacket. The sight was enough to wake him up quite a bit, and he cleared his throat awkwardly as he asked, "What are you doing here?"

Billy didn't answer as he looked around the living space, slinging his jacket over his arm casually. "This is a nice place you got here. Wouldn't have guessed you lived in digs like this."

"How did you even know I lived here?"

"Tina pointed it out while we were drivin'."

That made Steve pause, "What were you out doing with Tina?"

The question didn't come out the way he meant it, and he cursed under his breath when Billy gave him a smug look.

"She wanted me to take her home after school," Billy assured him. "Figured I'd show her what my car could do."

"Uh huh. You still didn't answer my other question," Steve tried again.

And for the smallest of seconds, Billy looked as if he were a deer caught in headlights. A strange look flashed across his features before one of composure landed.

"Turns out you've got the only lighter that I can easily track down," he replied, hooking his thumbs on his jean belt loops.

Steve wondered if the junior was trying to play it cool. He sighed, "My bad, I meant to give it back before I left earlier." His irritation with Nancy was still running strong in him. He ended up making up some bullshit lie to the nurse and left school early, and as soon as he got home he went straight to his bed and slept.

Billy shrugged, "Thought I'd come by and get it while I was still out."

Steve nodded, motioning for Billy to follow him as he started walking towards the dining room. Billy had another thing coming if he thought he was going to be given a tour of his house. After the bathroom incident this morning he didn't trust being in alone in the same space as Billy for too long. He chided himself for not getting the memo after the party, but now all that mattered was getting Billy the hell out of his house.

As soon as they were in the dining room, Steve made a beeline for his backpack across the room. However he wasn't quick enough to get there before Billy made another quip.

"Your parents make you do your homework at the dinner table?" he snickered, leaning against the wall.

"No, my parents aren't around," Steve explained as he shuffled through his bag, "This is just the most convenient spot really."

The lack of response from Billy made Steve look up from what he was doing, and he found the junior staring back at him with a guilty look of horror.

"Uh... I'm sorry?" Billy offered awkwardly, standing up straight.

"Oh. Oh!" Steve finally caught on to what Billy was probably thinking, and he kicked himself mentally for continuously phrasing things wrong tonight. "No man, they're like still around, but they're never really here is what I meant."

Billy visibly relaxed, his tone a little softer, "So you're just here by yourself?"

"Most of the time yeah. They're always traveling or doing something for their jobs so it's mostly just me hanging out around here." Steve pulled the lighter out from the bottom of the bag, triumphantly holding it up in the air, "Got it!"

"This place is too big to be livin' in alone," he heard Billy mumble to himself. As Steve stood up, Billy began walking back out of the dining room and into the living room, seeming almost uncaring of the lighter and more concerned by the fact that Steve was essentially living on his own. He followed, lighter in hand, and he had a sudden feeling as to where Billy would end up being.

And his hunch was right. When he turned the corner, he found Billy standing in front of the sliding glass doors that led to the pool out back.

"Thinking of going for a swim, Hargrove?" Steve jested as he moved to stand a couple feet from Billy.

“In this cold as hell weather? Not a chance,” Billy shivered. “But why does it look all weird like that?”

Steve knew he was referring to the smoke hovering above the pool, and he was hesitant to tell him the reason why, “It’s a heated pool.”

There was a single beat of silence.

The next thing Steve knew, Billy was pulling the sliding glass door open and stepping back out into the chilly air. He left the door open, and Steve called out to him, “You know I was only joking about swimming right?”

“Yeah,” Billy called over his shoulder, turning his head slightly. From where he stood Steve could see a wide grin forming on Billy’s face as he continued to speak, “But how often do you get a chance to swim in a heated pool?”

Steve crossed his arms, muttering to himself about Billy’s poor manners. Who just invites themselves into someone else’s pool? As he watched Billy toe off his shoes and socks, he should have figured that Billy would’ve jumped at the chance to swim in the pool. Most people have the courtesy to ask first though.

With some resign, Steve moved over to the closet that held the beach towels, grabbing one for Billy and another for himself, just in case the junior decided to get cocky and splash him. When he stepped outside, closing the sliding door behind him, Billy was already shirtless and tugging down his jeans, leaving on just his boxers. He threw his jeans into the clothes pile next to him and swung around, that same grin still plastered on his face.

“You gonna join me or leave me hangin’?” he asked, opening his arms out wide in invitation.

Steve walked over to him and set his towel on the edge of the pool, “I think I’ll leave you hanging actually.”

He had just tossed his own towel and Billy’s lighter onto the nearest lounge chair when he felt a firm grip on his wrist. Steve snapped his head to face Billy, and the younger man’s grin had turned devilish. In

a flurry of movement, Billy tugged Steve forward as he himself fell backwards into the pool. It happened so suddenly that Steve barely protested, instead allowing himself to be pulled in, all the while shouting indignantly. The sound of Billy laughing hysterically filled his ears before it was sharply cut off by the rush of water that hit him.

Steve plummeted into the warmth of the water, the heat reminiscent of a dream now fading fast in his memory.

He resurfaced only seconds later, gasping for air as he rubbed his eyes. He could hear Billy splashing around him, chuckling at Steve no doubt. When Steve could finally see clearly again, he found Billy to be floating several feet away, his face partially submerged with only his nose and eyes visible.

Steve glared at him, albeit a little half heartedly, as he shoved his wet hair from his face, "Thanks for getting me soaked asshole." Billy's cheeks rose out from the water from what Steve could only assume to be a grin, and all he could do was sigh.

He swam to the edge of the pool and hoisted himself up from the water. The cool air bit at his skin when he sat several inches away cross legged, so he grabbed the towel that was meant for Billy and slung it over his shoulders.

And for the next little while, Steve simply and unabashedly watched Billy swim around in the moonlight.

He watched him do little flips and tricks, watched him to hand stands as long as he could, watched him swim from end of the pool to the other as fast as he could. He watched Billy genuinely enjoy himself. And for the briefest of moments, Steve forgot all about Nancy and his irritation towards her, about Jonathan and his resentment towards him. He forgot about all the problems that floated in his head, the worries that nagged at him silently.

For the briefest of moments he just sat there, more content than he had been in months.

HE HADN'T REALIZED he'd been dozing off until he heard splashing right in front of him. His eyes fluttered open, and he was greeted by the sight of Billy hoisting himself up out of the pool to lean forward on his elbows. His cheeks were tinted pink from the water and excessively swimming around. His hair was slicked back, though several strands were still sticking to his face.

"You callin' it a night, Harrington?" he asked, his head tilting a bit.

Steve went to respond, but a yawn came out instead.

"I'll take that as a yes," Billy said with a smug look, moving to get out of the pool completely. As he walked over to get his towel, Steve slowly rose to his own feet. He took a step away from Billy's clothes, giving him some space to put them back on. Him redressing was a gentle reminder to Steve that he still wasn't really wearing anything substantial. Thankfully the towel covered up much of his torso and saved a little bit of his grace.

The pair walked back inside Steve's house, a comfortable silence lingering only until Steve told Billy to follow him up to the laundry room. Billy followed him obediently up the staircase, and they turned to walked down the short hallway. Steve's bedroom door was ajar, he'd didn't think to close it behind him earlier, but they passed by it quickly. The stop to the laundry room was brief, Steve taking both of their towels and setting them up to dry on the drying rack.

He turned around to find that Billy was no longer behind him, and when he walked back out into the hallway he found his bedroom door to be completely open.

Steve sighed, he didn't have the energy to care about Billy's tendency to just waltz into places without asking anymore. When he got into his room, Billy was standing next to his bed stand, holding something in his hand. Steve didn't have much time to guess what it was, Billy turned around and he immediately recognized the object he held.

"You smoke?" Billy asked, not attempting to hide the surprise in his voice.

Steve had been meaning to throw the pack of cigarettes away for

some time now. However, a little part of him told him to leave the pack where it was, tucked under his alarm cloack.

“A lot of shit happened last year,” Steve explained, being purposely vague. “Nancy urged me to quit after... some stuff that happened. I honestly can’t even remember the last time I did smoke.”

Billy hummed, setting the box back where he found it. He didn’t seem too interested in what Steve meant by “some stuff”, and he was more than grateful that he didn’t ask about it either. “I tried quitting once,” he admitted, “But I went straight back to smoking after a week.”

“Can’t go cold turkey with it,” Steve told him, walking over to his bed and plopping down backwards on it. He closed his eyes for a moment, “It’s gotta be a gradual thing.”

Steve didn’t take Billy’s lack of response to heart. The junior was probably looking around his room, though other than the cigarettes, nothing would really be genuinely interesting or out of the ordinary. Steve found that he was spending less and less time in his room nowadays, usually favoring to at least be in the living room hanging out or in the dining room working or in the kitchen cooking.

With his eyes closed he could feel himself losing the battle of trying to stay awake.

“If I fall asleep on you don’t do anything weird,” Steve managed to yawn the warning.

Billy’s chuckle was a soft one, his voice fading with Steve’s consciousness, “Even I wouldn’t take advantage of Aurora sleeping.”

The last thing Steve remembered was the sensation of warm fingers running through his hair before succumbing to sleep once more.

Notes for the Chapter:

- In S1E2, Steve's seen smoking at the small get together he holds at his house, so I decided I would bring this back.

- Billy's making a reference to Princess Aurora in Sleeping Beauty, and is essentially calling Steve a sleeping beauty. I have a headcanon of both Billy and Max shitting on the Disney animated films but Billy low key has an affinity for a couple of them.

6. Can't Keep My Hands to Myself

Summary for the Chapter:

The second mentioning of Nancy had Steve's defenses rising. He stood his ground, sizing Tommy up. He knew he may no longer be the King, but that didn't mean he was going to allow other people walk over him like he was weak.

He was still Steve fucking Harrington, and he can he still beat the shit out of anyone who decided to challenge him.

Notes for the Chapter:

I should have known better than to think that I'd be able to do things unrelated to Christmas during Christmas. I meant to get this out to you all on Christmas Eve, so, as a belated gift, I made the chapter an extra long and hopefully interesting read. I'm actually kind of worried about this chapter, so let me know what you all think about it, and sorry if it's bad.

Thank you all for reading, comments and for leaving kudos! Happy readings ~

- Dave

Chapter Title: "Hands to Myself" - Selena Gomez (GØLDN Rendition)

Alternative Chapter Title: "Broken Bones" - CRX

HIS AWARENESS CAME slowly, a tickling sensation rousing him from his sleep. His first instinct was to bury himself further into the warmth of his bed, and his body curled towards it almost subconsciously. He inhaled a deep breath through his nose and was met with the scent of old smoke and cigarettes.

His face tickled.

It was weird. He hadn't remembered pulling the covers over himself when he went to sleep earlier. Nor putting the pillow back on his bed. And, usually, it never got this warm while he was sleeping. Whenever his parents were out of town, he kept the house temperature a little lower than normal, so most of the rooms would be chilly. The only time he could remember being this warm was whenever Nancy slept over, but he knew she wasn't here because -

His face tickled again.

His eyes shot open.

The lights in his room had been turned off. Moonlight poured in from outside, casting odd shadows along the walls and ceiling. But from where he lay, the light outlined the silhouette of the person sleeping next to him almost perfectly. When his eyes adjusted to the dim light, his breath shuddered as his heart stuttered to a stop.

Billy Hargrove was sleeping peacefully next to him, the covers only pulled up as high as his waist, his chest bare as it rose and fell with each breath. His arm was outstretched, and Steve realized that he was right, he hadn't put his pillow back on his bed; his head was laying on Billy's bicep. After a moment, Steve also realized just how close he was to the younger man. Billy's face was turned towards him, his features softer than Steve had ever seen them. He could practically count how many eyelashes he had, and there were almost too many. Under the covers, one of Steve's legs had managed to lay on top of Billy's, the denim of his jeans feeling rough against his skin.

Steve couldn't believe this was happening. How long had Billy been here, sleeping next to him?

He carefully shifted off of the junior, trying his best to not wake him up, and he turned to peer at his clock. The numbers read 1:08 in the morning. He let out a silent sigh of relief, Billy hadn't been there *that* long thankfully. If he woke him up now he could probably be back at his own house without anyone really noticing.

Maybe.

Steve slipped back over to Billy's side, propping himself up on his elbows. The moment felt a little too surreal. Billy Hargrove, *the* Billy Hargrove, was sleeping in his bed right now. Though in this moment it didn't really feel like Billy Hargrove. The Billy he'd slowly been getting to know was cocky, terribly so, and outwardly aggressive. He knew he was the coolest person at Hawkins High, and it was probably true. He was the Keg King, the new King of Hawkins, and he had the attitude to match.

But this Billy, the Billy in front of him now, didn't seem like he would be any of those things. If he leaned in closer, he could see how calm Billy looked, how more reserved he seemed.

If he leaned in more, he could see just how young he looked. His defined face still had a roundness that would disappear within the next year or so.

If he leaned in a bit more, he'd be able to count every single eyelash he had, and he would probably be counting for an eternity.

And if he leaned in just a little more, he'd wouldn't have much time to dwell on the fact that he wouldn't mind an eternity.

The bed creaked.

Billy's eyes flew open startlingly fast, and it was in that moment did Steve realize that he was less than an inch away from Billy's face. He froze under Billy's intense stare, their eyes locked and unmoving. For a second, Billy almost looked confused, as if he didn't know where he was, as if he didn't recognize Steve leaning over him. In that same second, Steve couldn't help but wonder if Billy would shove him away.

But in that next second, Steve didn't dare move when Billy shifted his arm up towards him, nor when he felt Billy's fingers comb through the hair at the base of his neck. And he still didn't move, as he allowed himself to be guided when Billy's light grasp turned tight, his hand fisting to hold onto his hair. Billy pulled him down gently with hooded eyes, and with every fiber of his being screaming at him not to, Steve allowed his lips to meet Billy's own, his eyes fluttering closed.

The kiss was nothing like what Steve expected it to be. Lightly chapped lips moved tentatively, softly pressuring Steve to open up to him as his tongue glided over Steve's bottom lip. The heated gesture was rewarded with a shuddering breath from Steve as he let the junior under him have his way.

Steve felt like his surroundings were melding together. He was losing track of where he was, what he was doing, as all his attention was focused solely on *Billy* .

He felt a pressure building somewhere unseen, and a growing sense of urgency had him deepening the kiss on his own. He murmured Billy's name into his mouth, moved his arms so that they rested on either side of Billy's shoulders, moved his hands to tuck under Billy's head. He was vaguely aware of the covers shifting as Billy moved his free hand to grasp his hip, but rough fingertips slipping under the waistband of his boxers was enough to make his whole body shiver and tingle.

Curious fingers traced along his hip bone, with each pass over making Steve's stomach tense up, leaving him just a little more breathless than he was before. The grip on his hair loosened as it slid over his heated skin to cup the side of his face.

The hold on his side turned to a light pushing pressure, and Steve registered that Billy was guiding him to lay on his back, their kissing talently uninterrupted all the while. Steve looped his arms around Billy's neck for support, capturing him into staying close. And as Billy maneuvered them around, he swung his leg over Steve's body, his hand moving so his arm could snake around the small of Steve's back. The senior found himself pinned underneath Billy's weight, found himself being straddled by him, being devoured by him.

And he found that he didn't mind it, that he even *wanted* it.

Billy held himself up by resting his elbow near Steve's head, and he didn't allow for any air to pass between them as their kissing became deeper, their breathing heavier.

Steve was losing his mind quickly, his brain nearly short circuiting when Billy effortlessly pulled Steve's body up to press against his

own. Billy's taut skin felt like electricity on Steve's, the contact leaving him gasping as his head lulled backwards. Their kissing broke then, but Billy was quick to lock onto a new target as he dipped his head to kiss and suck gently on Steve's neck.

Tremors racked through him in waves, and Steve wanted nothing more than to completely give in to what his body wanted and needed.

To completely give himself up to Billy.

Billy was relentless on his neck, nearly pushing Steve off the edge as a moan escaped from his lips.

"*Please*," Steve begged, rolling his hips to buck against Billy, against something, *anything*. The suddenness of the action shocked Billy, and on reflex he bit down hard on Steve's neck.

And for the briefest of moments, Steve lost all control over himself.

Pain had Steve's lips crying out Billy's name as if it were the only word he'd ever learned to speak.

Pleasure had Steve's lips pouring out Billy's name as if it were his saving grace.

However it was the sound of Billy's name that brought everything to a grinding halt. In a matter of seconds, Billy had dropped Steve back onto the bed and risen off of him and into a kneeling position over him. In those same seconds, Steve composed himself and remembered that Billy needed to *leave*.

"Billy, you didn't leave," Steve managed to say brokenly. "You fell asleep with me."

The final sounding of his name broke the spell he was under.

"Steve?" he whispered, as if he were just realizing what was happening.

His name coming from Billy's mouth would have been enough for him to latch onto the junior again, but he kept his body restrained

out of the sudden unexplainable fear rising in him, “Y-yes?”

He could see Billy’s eyes widen at the response, and he immediately rolled himself off Steve to sit on his haunches beside him. Billy was rubbing his face with his hands as Steve slowly sat in an upright position. He could hear Billy saying something aloud, but it came out muffled from under his hands.

“What?” Steve asked him.

Billy moved his hands only enough to uncover his mouth. “I said, I thought I was fuckin’ dreaming.”

The comment was enough to make Steve blush, and he was forever glad that the room was as dark as it was.

As Billy moved to get up, he asked for the time.

“It’s one in the morning,” Steve supplied, moving with shaking limbs to sit on the edge of the bed. He was left with feeling jittery, seemingly unable to calm himself down whatsoever. Billy cursed under his breath, and after a beat of silence Steve heard the bed creak as the junior shifted his weight. Creaking floorboards alerted him that Billy was standing, probably putting on his shirt and his jacket. Steve was about to slip on a pair of sweatpants that were laying on his floor when he heard Billy walking around his bed. He looked up to find the junior looming over him, his entire front visible from standing directly in the moonlight.

Steve was shocked to see how disheveled he was. Billy’s hair stuck up in odd places in an intense case of bedhead, and his jeans were riding dangerously low on his hips. He hadn’t put on his shirt or jacket just yet, holding them under his arm, and in the dim light Steve was able to see the tinge of pink that was spread across Billy’s chest. And his eyes, his eyes were dark, his pupils blown so wide that Steve could barely make out the blueness of his irises. It wasn’t fair to look that sexy Steve thought to himself.

However, the sudden flash of awe on Billy’s face made Steve wonder how *he* looked right then.

It was several moments before the silence was broken.

“Are you and that chick not dating anymore?” Billy asked.

Steve had been expecting something about what just happened, so the question took him back a little, “As far as I’m concerned, we aren’t.”

The response seemed to please Billy, “Good.” Steve watched him slip on his shirt and jacket quickly, a million questions flooding his brain.

He didn’t get to ask a single one before Billy continued on, “Don’t worry ‘bout getting up, I’ll see myself out.”

Billy reached his arm out to touch Steve’s chest, his hand pushing him backwards. Steve let himself fall onto his bed, bouncing a little when his back hit his mattress.

And with that, Billy made his exit. Steve listened to him walk down the hallway, down the stairs, and finally out the front door. He didn’t realize that he was holding his breath until he exhaled at the sound of the front door closing. His million questions were soon replaced with thoughts of how screwed he was and what he was going to do about this.

The events replayed themselves in his mind, and it dawned on him that he had used Billy’s name for the very first time, and Billy used his. And that shouldn’t have made him blush, but it did.

THE LAST THING Steve wanted to do was go to school.

He didn’t want to run into Nancy. Steve didn’t know if he would be able to face her after their conversation they had yesterday. Still

thinking about it all made him hurt in ways that it shouldn't have. But he knew why it did, and even that hurt to think about too.

However, that wasn't the biggest reason why he didn't want to go to school. He was unsure of whether he would see Nancy, but the chances of seeing Billy were damn near perfect.

Steve didn't know how he was going to react if - not if, *when* he saw Billy. Part of him knew that they would just act as though nothing happened in the first place, much like with what happened at the Halloween party. But another part of himself knew that if he was able to, he would just run away from Billy as soon as he was near. And then there was another part of him that wanted to talk to Billy about it, to figure out just what in the hell they were doing and what was happening because Steve sure as hell didn't.

Though he got the feeling that Billy didn't know what was really going on either.

The thought didn't make him feel any better though.

As soon as he got to school, Steve did everything in his power to avoid the two, walking fast to classes and in the hallways, making sure he kept an eye out every time he went to his locker, not staying in the same location for too long. And for the most part, his avoidance tactics worked.

That is, until he realized that he had basketball practice during the lunch break.

He thought about the possibility of skipping it completely, but he knew the coach would wring his neck come next practice. So, as 11:45 rolled around, Steve found himself being dragged unwillingly to practice. His slow pace caused him to be a couple minutes late, and when he entered the gym he found everyone already doing warm up drills. His eyes were immediately attracted to Billy, it almost was becoming too easy to spot him now.

The junior was with the group on the other side of the court, dribbling a basketball with ease as he waited his turn for a layup. He was, of course, the first one to go shirtless, an almost preemptive

measure for the scrimmages they had every practice nowadays. Steve's entrance seemed to go unnoticed, so he set his belongings down quickly and joined with the opposite group.

With Billy not in his group, he fell into an easy rhythm with the others players. He made small talk with most of them, something that wasn't all that different than how it was before Billy came into the picture. Usually the only person that had a problem with him who was on the team was Tommy, and he tended to stay away from Steve during practice.

The warm ups flew by pretty quick, and before he knew it the coach was calling them in to divide them up again for a practice game. They were nearing the start of their season, so more and more often the coach was having them do practice matches to prep for the upcoming games instead of their regular conditioning drills. These practice matches were mainly the coaches' way of determining starters for JV and varsity, and as the season drew closer, players started to take the matches more seriously.

Steve knew as soon as the coach started calling out who'd be shirts and skins that he'd be in the starting batch for shirts. He'd worked his way up towards being one of the few point guards for the team, however his hard work hadn't been shown once since Billy joined the team. The junior came in already knowing the game and rules and drills, and his ball handling skills were impressive enough for him to snatch up a shooting guard position. That made the other players nervous.

Billy Hargrove was a wild card for everyone.

But he was a different kind of wild card for Steve.

Steve was vaguely aware of being assigned to do the jump off, so he set on his way to the middle of the court as the rest of the players dispersed themselves. He zoned out as he waited, shifting his weight back and forth from his feet, tapping his fingers lightly on his shorts, unblinking as he stared at the ground.

A pair of black converse walked into his view.

Steve looked up and he felt his heart lurch from his chest.

If he had been paying attention, he would have heard that Billy today would also be doing the tip off. The junior stood in front of him, his usual cool and collected demeanor in place was accompanied with a shit eating grin.

The coach blew his whistle. The game was about to start.

“You ready, Harrington?” he asked, smile unwavering.

Steve didn’t say anything.

He wasn’t.

ONCE AGAIN, THE Shirts lost.

Although the game was short, it was a brutal one. Billy had scored 21 points alone.

Steve was left sweaty and breathless in the worst way possible.

When the final whistle blew, Steve doubled over, taking the only break he’d gotten the entire game. For some reason, the coach had refused to let either him or Billy be subbed out, and they played the entire game at full speed to keep up with the fresh legs.

He looked up to peer around the court. Players were already heading to the locker room to shower and change, the coach had just told them good game and to get out of here. His eyes found Billy’s form standing tall and proud across the court. Other than being drenched in sweat, he looked perfectly fine and unfazed by the running.

But Steve knew better.

It was in the way his body was moving. He could see the way Billy’s shoulders and arms twitched just barely from overuse. He was tensing up his hands and fingers, trying to get rid of the strain of the

consistent dribbling. His legs moved with just the slightest hint of stiffness. His chest was flushed, the redness creeping up his neck ever so slowly. His nostrils were flared from trying to maintain his breathing.

Billy was fucking exhausted, but it seemed as if only Steve was picking up on it. at all.

He realized he was blatantly staring when Billy's attention was turned to him. Steve turned away swiftly, forgoing any finesse in stealthiness as he hastily made his way to the locker room.

Steve ignored the changing bodies around him as he approached his locker, opening it grab his spare clothes.

He had only managed to pull off his shirt when he heard someone whistling at him. Steve turned to the sound, his gaze landing on a smug looking Tommy across the way.

"That's a pretty impressive bruise there, Stevey," Tommy said condescendingly, "Nancy give you that one a while ago or do you got someone new already too?"

Steve's eyes narrowed at his former friend as the remark created a murmur amongst the locker room, "What're you talking about?"

Billy chose that moment to walk into the room, and he seemed to be just as confused as he looked around at everyone looking at Steve. But when he followed their glances and looked at Steve, his own eyes widened just a fraction.

Tommy scoffed, "You haven't looked in a mirror at all have you? Pretty hard to miss a baseball sized hickey."

Steve slapped the side of his neck, horrified. The events of last night came flooding back to him, and the thought of Billy having *caused the hickey* was enough to have him blushing.

"While Nancy's skipping school with the freakshow, you're over here hookin' up and having a great ol' time," Tommy went on nastily, moving to stand closer to Steve.

The second mentioning of Nancy had Steve's defenses rising. He stood his ground, sizing Tommy up. He knew he may no longer be the King, but that didn't mean he was going to allow other people walk over him like he was weaksome kind of weakling.

He was still Steve fucking Harrington, and he can he still beat the shit out of anyone who decided to challenge him.

"You better watch what you say about her," Steve warned him.

Tommy laughed again, "You still don't know do you? The former miss Queen of Hawkins skipped school halfway with Jonathan yesterday and still haven't shown up."

The news shocked Steve undeniably, but he kept his face schooled in a glare. She must have left right after their conversation he connected. It probably shouldn't even be a surprise that she'd left with Jonathan, however it still seemed a bit odd to Steve. He knew things weren't quite adding up, because he knew that Nancy wouldn't just up and skip school. She never skipped, not even for sickness.

Before Steve could even make a comeback, Tommy pushed forward again, prodding Steve in his chest.

"Guess you aren't the only one whoring around though are you?" he sneered.

Steve smacked his hand away, however right after he did so he watched Tommy get violently shoved into the locker beside him.

"Don't ya think that's enough?"

Steve was so focused on Tommy that he didn't even notice Billy coming up behind him, but Billy slamming Tommy against the lockers was enough to catch the eyes of everyone. He leaned over Tommy and kept the senior pressed against the locker with his hand pressed to Tommy's neck. From where Steve stood, he could see the murderous look that overcame Billy's features.

And it was absolutely terrifying.

"I said," Billy repeated darkly, "Don't you think that's *enough* ?"

Tommy nodded rushedly, but Billy wasn't satisfied just yet.

"If I see you starting shit on *my* team and fucking with *my* players again, I will fucking *break your bones* ," growled Billy. "Do I make myself crystal fucking clear?"

Tommy only nodded again and was rewarded with more pressure from Billy's hand on his neck.

Billy leaned in closer, whispering menacingly, "I didn't quite hear you."

"Y-yes, crystal clear yes," Tommy choked. Only then did Billy let him go, and he left Tommy gasping for air. And for a moment, Tommy looked hurt. Was he just putting on a show for Billy earlier by getting in Steve's face? Steve didn't get to a chance to dwell on it much when Billy began addressing everyone in the locker room.

"The same goes for all of you," Billy threatened, glaring dangerously around at the players. "There's plenty of bitches in the sea, so I don't give a damn about who you fuck. But if I catch wind of any other shit like this and you will get thrown off this team personally by yours truly. Now if you've got nothing else to say then get the *hell* out of here."

Nobody needed to be told twice. Steve watched in stunned awe as the rest of the players, including Tommy, change so quickly they tripped over themselves and rushed out. In a matter of minutes, the only people in the locker room was himself and Billy. His pissed expression soon melted into one of exhaustion, and he pinched the bridge of his nose as he leaned into the lockers.

Steve didn't really know what to say, but he figured a little humor couldn't hurt.

"I think you might have single handedly made yourself captain of the basketball team."

Billy looked up at the comment, and immediately upon looking at Steve his shoulders relaxed and a smile crept up onto his face. "You know, I think you might be right Harrington."

Steve chuckled, he knew he was right about that at least, but he had to ask, “So what was that about?”

Billy sighed, probably knowing that the question would come up, “I don’t really know, I see him touching you and the next thing I know I’m seeing red.”

The underlying possessiveness in the statement was hard to miss, and all it did was make Steve even more confused than he already was about Billy’s relationship with him.

“Sorry about uh... that,” Billy said awkwardly, gesturing to Steve’s neck.

Steve finally remembered that that was the whole instigator to the situation at hand, and he moved past Billy to where the mirrors were to get a look at his neck. Sure enough, right at the side of his where his neck met his shoulder was a massive blue and purple bruise. He looked closer, shocked to see that he could still make out Billy’s teeth marks.

He trailed his fingers over the bruise, and out of the corner of his eye he saw Billy hovering a little ways next to him. Steve looked back at Billy to say something, but they were interrupted by the school bell sounding. The lunch break was over.

The pair didn’t linger and they hurriedly got dressed. The promise to see each other again later was made in hushed, unspoken tones.

And by the end of the day, the news had spread to the entire school that a certain junior was the new captain of the Hawkins basketball team.

Notes for the Chapter:

Expect to see a myriad of basketball games in the boys' future. *swoosh*

Also an official FFEYHO playlist is coming soon, just f.y.i.

7. Unusual

Summary for the Chapter:

Far too often did his thoughts skirt around Billy, and with that came a sense of unease and a bit or regret bubbling in his stomach. What was he doing right now? Was Billy still upset with him? Why was he upset in the first place? And why did that even matter to him?

It matters because you won't let it go.

Steve shook his head. It wasn't that -

It matters because it's Billy you won't let go of.

Notes for the Chapter:

So I actually had this chapter already written and ready to go, but then I looked it over again, hated it, rewrote it, and then the same thing happened again for a second time. But now we're getting into more of the plot of S2, which is exciting! There's some new formatting stuff going on, so heads up, nothing crazy. The format just reminds me more of a novel style format.

In other news, I'm currently devising another Harringrove fan fic that's pretty interesting, so be on the look out for that in the upcoming weeks. (Hint: If you a fan of Michael Crichton, you're in for a *colossal* surprise.)

Huge thanks to those who've left comments, kudos, and those who are just reading in general. I love you all very much! If you aren't already, follow me on Tumblr at dave-starcross! I love being able to interact with all of you and I experience an immense joy in y'all tagging me in things.

Here's to a fresh start in 2018! Happy New Years everyone!

- Dave

Chapter Title: "Unusua" - RAC feat. MNDR

STEVE DIDN'T SEE Billy again for the rest of the school day. The only other time he would have been able to was during their honors calculus class, except that they didn't have that class scheduled for Fridays. Steve had spent that period dozing off in his hidden bathroom.

He couldn't help but wonder how things were going for the junior after the locker room incident earlier, though he got the feeling that it wasn't that much of a big deal to Billy.

After the final bell rang for dismissal, Steve found himself hurrying a little bit faster to get to his car. He was still trying to avoid Nancy, but to his surprise he still had yet to see her all day. Not even a simple pass by in the hallways once. At first he doubted what Tommy had said about her skipping school, but now he realized that that might actually be the case.

But where was she?

It didn't take long for him to reach his car, he shoved his books and things into the passenger seat and climbed into the driver's seat. His eyes flicked up for a second to look out the windshield, and he spotted Billy leaning against the Camaro not too far away. Steve wanted to get out of the car to talk to him, but the odd look on Billy's face had him stopped in his tracks.

Billy's face was placid, but his eyebrows were drawn together in an intense gaze. Steve followed his line of sight curiously. He found his eyes landing on Lucas following a red headed girl outside the middle school. He recognized her a moment later - she was the girl he had seen getting out of Billy's car Tuesday morning.

Steve was too far away to figure out what they were saying, but even from where he was he could tell that the exchange was a little

heated. He watched Lucas raise his hands in the air in what seemed to be frustration, and soon after the girl throws her skateboard on the ground and rides off on it. She rides it far enough to reach Billy's car, and it looks like she doesn't say a word to him as she gets inside.

What perturbs Steve is just how long Billy stares at Lucas. Even as Lucas is walking away, Billy is still staring at him, and it's only when the boy is out of sight does Billy even begin to move. Steve watches him travel around the front of the Camaro, the same expression still on his face, and he gets in without hesitation.

Steve's a little relieved that Billy didn't catch him staring at the whole exchange. It was just... there was something about the look on the junior's face that didn't sit right with him. And what bothered him more was that he didn't know why.

Several minutes later, Billy started up his car and drove off. And not too long after, Steve followed suit, the thought of what just happened still nagging him at the back of his mind.

HE PEERED AT himself in the bathroom mirror, his body stripped down to just his boxers. He was dully aware of the cold tiles under his feet as his eyes traveled up his body. The poor lighting he was used to seemed to be just a little bit worse today, casting odd and unattractive shadows over his skin. Or maybe it was just him looking a little bit worse today. He couldn't quite tell really.

He couldn't recall the moment when he started to not like his body so much. It seemed to be a gradual thing, possibly even over the course of the past couple of years. It might have started out as a little thing, a small blip in the back of his mind.

I should probably start working out.

But even the tiniest of blips could have disastrous effects, spiralling out of control into an all consuming mess. And without knowing, Steve found himself in the midst of that mess.

It wasn't like a constant oppression, however it came in random bursts, maybe once or twice in a day then nothing for several weeks until it all comes crashing back. And it's worse that way, feeling as if everything was fine, and feeling that way for several long months, only to have that all rip away with just a single, unknowing glance in the mirror.

His eyes fell on the bruise on his neck. He reached up his hand to run his fingers over it for the countless time. With each press of the bruise came a burning reminder of the previous night, and he wouldn't admit it but everytime it left him a little breathless.

From downstairs, he heard the doorbell rang, it's sound bringing him out of his stupor. He shook his head, and the bell rang again. Steve pulled on the sweater and pants he had discarded outside the bathroom, and he rushed down the stairs as the bell rang once more. He pulled open one of the doors right as Billy spun around to face him, a grin plastered on his face.

"Hargrove," Steve said, slightly out of breath. "What're you doing here?"

Billy held up a 6-pack of beer and a plastic sack and quirked an eyebrow, "Dinner?"

BILLY SHUFFLED OUT a pack.

"Do you mind?" he asked, holding up a cigarette.

The question had Steve tilting his head up to look at the junior, raising his eyebrow as he shoveled rice into his mouth. They were seated on the floor of Steve's living room, surrounded by Chinese

take out boxes and several crushed beer cans. Billy was sprawled out on his back, and Steve sat cross legged next to him.

“Didn’t think you’d ask for permission,” Steve said in between bites.

Billy twirled the cigarette in his fingers, “Figured I would, since this is like your house and all.”

Steve smirked, “How considerate of you.”

Billy rolled his eyes and went to light his cigarette, “I did bring you food after all.”

“Speaking of that, why did you?” Steve asked, setting down his finished take out box and reaching for a crab rangoon.

“You said your parents are usually out of town, right?” Billy countered, breathing out a puff of smoke. “If I was in your position, I’d probably be tired of having to scrounge up food all the damn time.”

Steve blinked. Usually whenever his parents were away, his mom would make food and leave it in the fridge for him to reheat. But more often than not, it wouldn’t last him very long, or he would just forget there was food entirely. Though he would much rather make his own food. His mom wasn’t the best cook, and his dad couldn’t make toast even if his life depended on it.

“Well, you’re not wrong,” Steve admitted, taking a sip of his beer. “I cook enough to last me a couple of days at least, but that’s only if I’ve got the money to buy stuff in the first place.”

Billy nodded, blowing out a puff of smoke. “I learned how to cook back home. I could make you somethin’ one of these days if you want.”

That surprised Steve, but he didn’t say it out loud. Instead he said simply, “I’d like that, thank you.”

Billy let out a low hum in response, blowing away more smoke. Steve made a mental note to light some candles to get rid of the smell. He’d gotten caught once a while ago for smoking in the house, and the

outcome wasn't something he'd like to have happen again.

He rose slowly onto his feet, moving to pick up the discarded boxes and cans. He knew Billy was staring at him while he worked, and it made his body feel all tingly. Steve made sure not to bend down too much, he didn't want his sweater to ride up in front of the junior. It was bad enough that he'd already seen him in his boxers.

Steve was halfway to the kitchen when he heard Billy ask him a question, "You an only child, Harrington?"

"Yeah," he said over his shoulder, rounding the kitchen door to dump everything into the trash bin. "My parents wanted to have another kid, but with their schedules it didn't work out the way they wanted it to."

"There's a lot of rooms in this place," Billy observed from the floor, rolling onto his stomach, "Thought there'd be more of ya."

"Nah, just old me," Steve said in jest, plopping down onto the couch next to where Billy was laying.

"Well, you're definitely more than enough," the junior murmured as he put his lips to his cigarette again.

Steve felt a light blush creeping over his features, and he quickly switched the conversation around to save his face, "What about you?"

Billy eyed him from the floor, his face unreadable. "I don't have any."

Steve's eyebrows pulled together in confusion. "Who's the girl you always drop off then?"

"She's noone," Billy said with some finality in his tone, moving to stand up.

Steve watched him rise, another question ready on his lips, "Why do you take her to - ?"

Billy leaned over him, putting both his hands on the back of the couch and pinning Steve in. He dipped his head low to be on Steve's

eye level, and he was unbearably close. The rest of Steve's question died in his throat.

"I'd suggest you stop asking questions, Harrington," Billy warned him, his eyes narrowing dangerously. "Before you ask the wrong question and piss me off."

Any words Steve had were lost now,, and he realized he was actually too afraid to even speak. Billy's eyes traveled over Steve's face, but Steve didn't know what he was looking for. They stayed there for what seemed like forever before Billy finally stood up.

"See you later, Harrington," he said without looking back. Steve watched him exit through the front doors in somewhat of a shock.

Had he crossed a line without even knowing it?

The thought kept him worrying for the rest of the night, and kept him up until early in the morning.

IT TOOK STEVE nearly an hour to find a damned bouquet.

Earlier that morning, he made the last minute decision to at least try to make it up to Nancy. For what exactly he didn't know, he wasn't in the wrong at all, but his dad always told him that in disputes, women were always right. Steve figured that bringing something to her would maybe put them on better footing for... whatever their relationship was now, romantic or otherwise.

In the back of his mind though he knew that they wouldn't be able to have a stable relationship anymore, and it would take time for them both to bring about some semblance of friendship between them. Steve hoped that a bouquet could begin to bring that about.

Turns out however that finding just the right flowers proved to be more of a pain in the ass than he realized.

He had driven all around the town, popping into one flower store after the next, trying to find a bouquet that would suit Nance's tastes. Of course, it was at the very last store did he find them, and he paid the cashier a little too much, thrilled that he could finally drive to her house.

Before all of this, Steve had been hanging out around the house and picking things up. His parents would be coming back for Thanksgiving sometime next week, and he knew that if he didn't start cleaning now he wouldn't get anything done during the week. He had spent several long hours mindlessly floating from task to task, and he didn't stop until the place was spotless.

The only thing that had remained was the faint smell of smoke in the living room, but he couldn't bring himself to deal with it. Part of the reason for his cleaning was to keep himself distracted - far too often did his thoughts skirt around Billy, and with that came a sense of unease and a bit of regret bubbling in his stomach. What was he doing right now? Was Billy still upset with him? Why was he upset in the first place? And why did that even matter to him?

It matters because you won't let it go .

Steve shook his head. It wasn't that -

It matters because it's Billy you won't let go of .

Steve had ignored himself. Maybe that was the reason, maybe it wasn't, but Billy hadn't shown his face again, and Steve wasn't about to let himself go look for him.

He needed to get these flowers to *Nancy* , the one he *should* be thinking about, the one he *shouldn't* let go of.

Yet with her it just didn't feel the same, it *wasn't* the same. And he didn't want to think about why that was either.

So, as he drove to her house, he also made the decision to pretend that he was still fully in love with Nancy, that whatever this thing

with Billy wasn't even a thing, all for the sake making himself feel less confused and less of a mess than he was.

He sped his way through the neighborhoods, knowing the route to her house by heart now. With each mile that brought him closer, the anxiousness he felt rose as well. All he could do was hope that the flowers were enough for her.

Later he found himself parked out in front of the Wheeler's home. Flowers in hand, he exited his car, mustering up as much confidence as he possibly could.

"Listen, I'm thinkin'," he rehearsed, rounding the front of the car, "I love you. I'm sorry... sorry? What the hell am I sorry for?"

"Steve!" he heard his name called, and his pace staggered to a halt as he turned to see Dustin approaching him from across the yard.

"Are those for Mr. or Mrs. Wheeler?" Dustin asked, gesturing to the roses in his hand.

Steve gave him a weird look, "No?"

"Good." Dustin snatched the flowers from him and began walking to his car.

The action shocked Steve briefly, and he went to grab the flowers back, "Hey, what the hell - Hey!"

"Nancy isn't home," Dustin informed him without turning around.

Steve stilled. Nancy wasn't home? "Where is she then?" he asked, feeling himself deflate.

"Doesn't matter, we've got bigger problems than your love life." Dustin was already at Steve's car, pulling open the passenger door. "You still have your bat?"

"Bat?" Steve repeated. "What bat?"

"The one with the nails," he replied matter of factly.

Steve's guard immediately rose, the mere mentioning of the bat making him worry. "Why?"

"I'll explain it on the way," was all Dustin told him as he got into the car.

"Now?" Steve asked dumbly, rushing to the car himself.

"Yes, now, c'mon, c'mon!"

Steve didn't need to be told twice. But he would like to know just what in the hell was going on.

THE UNUSUAL DUO sat in a moment of silence.

"Wait a sec, so how big?"

Dustin sighed, using his hands to show the creature's length. "First it was like that," he used his index and thumb. "Now it's like this," the length grew to him having to use both of his hands.

Steve didn't believe him, "I swear to God if this is just some sort of little lizard - "

"It's not a lizard," Dustin argued.

"How do you know it's not?" Steve countered.

"How do I know it's not a lizard?"

"Yes! How do you know it's not just a lizard!"

"Because his face opened up and he ate my cat."

That shut Steve the hell up. That was a little more convincing than he'd realize, and the sour look on Dustin's face only solidified it. They drove in silence the rest of the way, Steve unsure of what to say to the boy, and still rather unsure of the whole situation.

Dustin directed Steve to his house, and once parked the pair got out of the car. Steve popped the trunk and glanced about its contents.

The bat was tucked away in the back with a blanket covering it up. He tossed the blanket off and grabbed for the handle, carefully pulling it out so he didn't accidentally knock it into Dustin. He grabbed a flashlight for safe measure as well and slammed the hood closed.

Dustin then led the way where the not-actually-a-lizard-but-probably-a-lizard supposedly was: in the basement. Dustin had said that he'd trapped the thing in there earlier.

Steve stepped up close to the closed doors, listening intently for any sort of sound. Dustin stood a couple feet away, obviously scared of the thing popping out.

Steve listened for a moment longer before saying, "I don't hear shit."

He turned to Dustin, shining the flashlight in his face. "Listen kid, I swear if this is some Halloween prank, you're dead."

"It's not - "

"Alright?"

"It's not a prank," Dustin exasperated, squinting his eyes. "Also get that out of my face."

He moved the light. "You got a key for this thing?"

Dustin moved to pull the key out of his back pocket and tossed it to Steve.

He caught it easily and turned back to the basement. He knelt down and unlocked it, yanking the metal doors open. Steve shone the flashlight down the flight of stairs, surveying if anything below was moving. He stood up then and began taking the steps down one at a time. He may not believe anything's down here, but that didn't mean that he wasn't going to be cautious.

He held the bat out in front of him as he descended the stairs slowly. The basement was pitch black, and when he reached the last step he shone the light about, looking for another light of some sort. Steve landed on an overhead light bulb and he went over to pull the string

hanging underneath it. Dim light flooded the room, and with a first glance around Steve knew that there wasn't anything in the basement. However, when he casted his eyes down onto the floor, something weird caught his eye.

He used the bat to pick up the unusual substance, and as he raised it into the air he could hear liquid dripping off from it. Steve used his flashlight to get a better look at it, and when he realized just exactly what he was looking at his eyes widened.

It was molted skin.

A sudden faint noise caught his attention, and he quickly moved his light towards the sound. He found to his horror a gaping hole in the wall, shaped as his someone, *something*, had tunneled down into the earth.

He rushed to the bottom of the stairs, and yelled at Dustin to come down.

When the boy made it to the last step, Steve showed him the hanging old skin.

Dustin seemed to recognize it almost immediately, "Shit..."

But Steve didn't say anything, instead shining the light to the hole in the wall for Dustin to see.

His eyes looked like they were about to pop out of his head, and he exclaimed a little louder, "Oh shit!"

The pair made their way over to the hole to peer inside. The brick that was there had been forcibly removed, and the destroyed remnants were laid out in front of the hole. Torn roots hung from the gap, and Steve could see the same ooze that covered the skin lined the sides of the tunnel. The closer they got to the tunnel, the more noticeable the sound of rumbling stones and digging became. And to their combined horror, the sound was quickly dissipating.

"What the fuck did you find Dustin?" Steve managed to say, at a loss as he shined the light down the tunnel.

“Dart,” Dustin said dumbly. “I found Dart.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Fun fact, I was dumb and accidentally posted this too early, so there's a small few of you who have read this chapter in 2017 before it being posted in 2018 haha.

8. Stake Out

Summary for the Chapter:

But when Dustin turned away from the window, when Steve saw the concern that was laid over every inch of his face, he knew he had to confront the beast head on. He had to, for Lucas and Max, for Dustin.

He had to protect these little shits, even if it meant risking his own life. He wouldn't forgive himself if something happened to one of them.

Notes for the Chapter:

This chapter ended up being twice the length I originally planned it to be, and is by far the longest chapter of FFEYHO. But it also features one of my favorite moments from the season, so I figured why not? Thank you all who have been reading the story thus far, those who have commented and left kudos! You're all wonderful human beings. Due to length, I may not have caught all the errors, so all mistakes are my own.

Happy reading!

- Dave

Chapter Title: "Stake Out" - Absolute Valentine

STEVE DIDN'T SLEEP that night. He didn't think he could even if he tried. Every time he shut his eyes, he'd get flashes of the beast he'd fought over a year ago resurging from the darkest corners of his mind, the hideous creature slinking out from the woods, coming to strip him of his very last breath and leave him dead and rotting.

1 a.m. had Steve tossing and turning in his bed, his mind unwilling to shut itself down, unwilling to succumb to sleep.

3 a.m. had Steve up and roaming the house, unable to keep still any longer, constantly checking the windows and doors and jumping at any sudden sounds.

5 a.m. had Steve sitting in the dining room, every light downstairs on, eyes glancing around a seemingly empty house.

7 a.m. had Steve exhaustedly cooking himself breakfast and, for the first time ever, making coffee from his mother's old coffee pot.

9 a.m. had Steve pulling up in front of Dustin's house again, three cups of coffee running through his veins as he honked his horn impatiently. He kept his sunglasses on as an attempt to hide the bags under his eyes as he watched for the boy, subconsciously tapping his finger on the steering wheel. They needed to come up with a plan to catch this... lizard... Demogorgon monster, and they both agreed to regroup in the morning to figure things out. Steve had told Dustin to be up and ready to go by 9; the earlier they could get things rolling the better off they would be.

Several minutes later, Dustin emerged from his front door, still slouching on his backpack as he rushed to Steve's car.

"Did you eat breakfast?" was the first thing Steve asked as Dustin got into the passenger seat.

Dustin gave him a funny look, pulling the car door closed as he replied, "Yes?"

Steve nodded, "Okay, good. We're gonna need all the energy we can get today."

Dustin nodded in agreement. It went unspoken between the two that this mission was going to be an all day affair, and at some point they were probably going to need reinforcements.

"So, you got any idea on how to catch this thing?" Steve asked, starting up the car.

"Well, I got Dart into the basement by luring him with lunch meat," Dustin thought aloud.

"If... *Dart's* grown in size, I don't think lunch meat is going to cut it."

"We could lure him with actual raw meat? Like, chunks of the stuff, and we can lure him into a trap."

"Okay, but where? We can't just trap him someplace in the middle of the town."

Dustin sat in thought, his mouth drawn into a line and his eyes squinted. And, as if a lightbulb went off in his head, Dustin's face lit up excitedly. "The junkyard," he whispered under his breath.

"Huh?" Steve asked, raising an eyebrow.

"There's a junkyard not too far away from here," Dustin explained, "We could lure Dart to the junkyard and capture him there! That way he's not anywhere near the town and no one would suspect a thing!"

Steve stifled a chuckle at the sight of Dustin looking proud of himself, "It's better than nothing at least."

He wouldn't admit it, but the kid was kind of growing on him. Just a little bit.

DUSTIN'S RADIO CRACKLED to life, it's staticky speakers grating on Steve's ears as he pulled the buckets of meat out from the trunk.

"Dustin! Dustin this is Lucas. Do you copy? Dustin?"

"Well, well, well, look who it is," Dustin smirked, already expecting the coming apology.

"Sorry, man. My stupid sister turned it off."

"Well, when you were having sister problems, Dart grew again. He escaped, and I'm pretty sure he's a *baby Demogorgon*."

“Wait. What?”

“I’ll explain later,” Dustin assured him. “Meet me and Steve at the old junkyard.”

“Steve?”

Steve rolled his eyes at the tone of Lucas’ voice.

“And bring your binoculars and wrist rocket,” Dustin added

“Steve Harrington?” Lucas repeated with disbelief.

Steve reached up to shut the trunk, informing Dustin that it was time to get a move on.

“Just be there, stat! Over and out.”

With that, the boys’ conversation ended, and Dustin moved to help carry their supplies. They ended up with two full buckets of raw meat (which was a fiasco in itself to get, as the butcher at the grocery store wouldn’t stop asking questions at the strange request), a liter of gasoline, and their backpacks stuffed with any weapons or necessities they could find.

They decided it would be best to torch the Demogorgon so it would be gone for good.

Steve made it a point to handle all the flammables, there was no way in hell he would allow Dustin to get near any of it. Even though they both had the shared goal of getting rid of the creature, Steve had another mission: to make sure that Dustin didn’t get hurt in the process. If anything did happen, Steve would be held responsible, which meant that if he had to he would wrap Dustin up in bubble wrap and hide him away somewhere safe.

And whenever Lucas showed up, he’d have to do the same for him too.

The thought made Steve sigh aloud. The last thing he wanted was to become a babysitter, but now it seems like he has no other choice.

“There should be train tracks around here somewhere,” Dustin informed him from behind as they began trudging through the forest, “They end right around where the junkyard is.”

Steve caught on to what Dustin was getting at, “We can use them as a trail for Dart to follow.”

An easy silence fell between them as they walked on, and eventually they did stumble upon the tracks. The old and rotted wooden thing seemed to stretch for miles and miles. Steve knew their work was going to be cut out for them, so he wasted no time in setting out the meat for the creature.

They fell into a rhythm, taking turns tossing out the meat from their buckets, spreading the portions out by roughly a yard apart. As they worked, Dustin explained how he had managed to obtain Dart in the first place, and how they were in this whole mess to begin with. But the thing that Steve latched onto the most was Dustin going on about some girl who’d shown up at Hawkins Middle School a couple of days ago.

Bells were sounding off in his head, “Alright, so let me get this straight. You kept something you knew that was probably dangerous in order to impress a girl who... who you just met?”

“All right, that’s grossly oversimplifying things,” Dustin said as he tossed out another couple chunks of meat.

“I mean, why would a girl like some nasty slug anyway?” Steve asked.

“An interdimensional slug? Because it’s awesome.”

“Well, even if she thought it was cool, which she didn’t, I... I just... I don’t know. I just feel like you’re trying way too hard,” Steve said with earnest.

Dustin scoffed. “Well, not everyone can have your perfect hair, all right?”

That threw Steve for a loop. “It’s not about the hair, man. The key with girls is just... just acting like you don’t care.”

“Even if you do?” the boy asked, looking up at Steve.

“Yeah, exactly. It drives them nuts.”

“Then what?”

“You just wait until, uh... until you feel it.”

“Feel what?”

Steve sighed. He couldn't believe he was about to have this conversation with Dustin of all people. “It's like before it's gonna storm, you know? You can't see it, but you can feel it, like this, uh... electricity, you know?”

“Oh, like in the electromagnetic field when the clouds in the atmosphere - “

“No, no, no, no, no,” Steve stopped him there before he could embarrass himself more. “Like a... Like a sexual electricity. You feel that and then you make your move.”

Dustin seemed to understand. “So that's when you kiss her?”

“No, whoa, whoa,” Steve stopped walking then, turning to face Dustin completely. “Slow down, Romeo. Sure, okay, some girls, yeah they want you to be aggressive. You know, strong, hot and heavy, like a lion. But others, you gotta be slow, you gotta be stealthy, like a... like a ninja.”

That made Dustin pause for a moment before asking, “What type is Nancy?”

Of course. Steve mentally kicked himself, he should have seen where the conversation would end up going. “Nancy's different,” he replied honestly. “She's different than the other girls.”

“Yeah, she seems pretty special, I guess.”

Pretty special. “Yeah, yeah, she is.”

“But this girl's special, too, you know,” Dustin went on walking, “It's

just, like, something about her.”

“Whoa, whoa, you’re not falling in love with this girl, are you?” Steve asked, eyeing his companion.

“Uh, no. No,” Dustin said a little too quickly.

“Okay, good. Don’t.”

“I won’t.”

“She’s only gonna break your heart, and you’re way too young for that shit.” Steve wasn’t about to say that he was speaking from experience, because he didn’t need to tell Dustin about his confusingly messed up love life. But, his advice wasn’t wrong. Dustin was way too young to experience heartbreak, hell they all were. And the longer they could avoid it, the better they would be off.

An awkward silence crept up between them, and the look on Dustin’s face made Steve feel guilty. He groaned, looking up towards the sky for a second, thinking about whether he was going to regret what he was going to say next.

“Fabergé.”

Dustin perked up at the foreign word, “What?”

“It’s Fabergé Organics,” Steve told him slowly, gesturing to his hair with his free hand. “Use the shampoo and conditioner, and when your hair’s damp, it’s not wet okay? When it’s damp - “

“Damp,” Dustin repeated with a nod.

“You do four puffs of the Farrah Fawcett spray.”

“Farrah Fawcett spray?” Dustin said, on the verge of laughing.

“Yeah, Farrah Fawcett. You tell anyone I just told you that and your ass is grass. You’re dead Henderson. Do you understand?” Steve warned seriously, giving him an intimidating, but harmless, glare.

“Yup,” was all the confirmation Dustin gave him.

This kid was going to be the death of him Steve thought. “Good. Okay.”

But the chuckle that came from Dustin was enough to have a small smile spread on Steve’s face.

They walked onwards, following the old tracks dutifully. Little by little, the light began to fade around them, and with each step forward they came closer and closer to the junkyard, their buckets a little lighter than before. They made idle talk, curious questions of how each of their years were going, how school was going, what they had been up to since the events of last year.

Steve glossed over the countless nights he’d lost due to his inability to sleep, over the problems that arose in his personal life with his family and Nancy, over the uncertainties that he held with himself and his future. And he knew that Dustin was probably doing the same thing, glossing over the bad in favor of the good. There was a mutual understanding that floated between them, and they made sure not to mention much aloud about what had happened.

The people at that lab had eyes and ears everywhere.

STEVE PEERED DOWN at the litter of broken down vehicles and abandoned parts that made up the junkyard, his lips tugging into a pleased grin. His eyes landed on the bus that was situated right in front of an large open space, a space they could use to their advantage.

“Oh yeah, this’ll do,” he said, taking off his sunglasses. “This’ll do just fine. Good call, dude.”

He didn’t see the smile on Dustin’s face that came from the compliment as they made their way down the hill, tossing out meat as they went. They talked animatedly about their plan of attack, pointing at various spots in the junkyard and moving around to get a

better sense of the small area.

Numerous ideas and plans were thrown out before they settled down on one that would be the best bet. The rest of the meat would get dumped into a pile several yards away from the bus. Dart, who would be hungry, would be lured to the pile thanks to the meat trail that followed the old tracks. Once Dart began to eat, Steve would, from the roof of the bus, drench the monster in gasoline and light the sucker on fire.

But first, they had to board up the bus for their own safety.

The pair dumped the buckets unceremoniously, and right as the last of the meat slid out they heard a familiar voice calling over to them. They looked up simultaneously, and from afar they saw Lucas waving at them, his bike parked beside him and standing next to him was...

Steve's eyes widened a fraction at the sight of her, the young girl with the long red hair that he had seen with Billy. Remnants of his last conversation with the junior were still stuck in his mind, and now, he'd finally get the chance to figure out who she was.

He leaned close to Dustin, asking, "Who's that?"

When the boy didn't respond immediately, Steve turned to look at him. And it was the stony look on his face that made Steve connect the dots: she was the one Dustin had been talking about earlier, the one he was trying to impress by keeping Dart in the first place. But there was more to the look on his face, and if Steve didn't know any better, he'd say it reminded something akin to jealousy.

"Her name's Max," Dustin whispered to him slowly, not wanting to be heard by the other two approaching. "She just moved to Hawkins a couple of days ago with her asshole brother."

Steve whipped his head back to face Max, alarmed. Her brother...?

"What is she doing here?" he wondered aloud, moving to stand up straighter. If this girl really was Billy's younger sister, he didn't want to hear her have a negative opinion of him at first sight.

"That's what I'd like to know," Dustin admitted before switching to a

more friendly tone. "Lucas! Can I talk to you for a minute? *Alone*?"

Steve took in the offended look on Max's face, probably from the lack of acknowledgement from Dustin, as Lucas set down his bike on a nearby car.

"Uh, yeah? Sure," Lucas said, eyes sweeping from Steve to Max and then to Dustin as he practically let himself be dragged away by him. They disappeared behind one of the cars, and the sight was enough to make Steve roll his eyes.

That left Steve alone with Max, and he didn't really know what to say to her. *Hey, could you tell me about your brother so I can figure out just what the fuck is going on between us and be less stressed about everything* was a little too hard hitting. Luckily for him however, it was Max who broke the awkward silence first.

"So, you're Steve Harrington?" she inquired, looking him up and down.

It was admittedly a slightly intimidating gesture, though he was more surprised by the tone of her voice more than anything. She spoke as if she already knew of him and of who he was.

"The one and only," he confirmed for her, "Who are you?"

"Max Mayfield," she informed him, "Just moved in this past week."

Steve nodded slowly, his mind trying to figure this out. Max *Mayfield*? Appearance wise she looked nothing like Billy, but what were the chances of two separate families moving into Hawkins at the same time? Let alone riding together to and from school?

"Well, welcome to Hawkins," he told her with some genuine intent, sticking his hand out for a handshake. "They say it's unlike any other."

The comment actually roused a smirk from Max, and she shook his hand, "I don't really like it much, but it's been interesting at least."

Her honestly drew out a chuckle from Steve, "It'll grow on you eventually."

"I doubt it," she said, looking around the junkyard before her attention was brought to the pile of meat on the ground. "So what're we doing here?"

"Well, Dustin's *interdimensional* lizard got loose, so we gotta trap it and kill it before it hurts anyone."

"Uh-huh..."

Steve knew she didn't believe a word he was saying, and honestly, he couldn't blame her. He didn't believe it until he saw it for himself. "If it means anything," he offered, "I've killed one of these things before."

And that got her attention, her eyes flickering up to meet his, "Really?"

Steve nodded, "But in order to make this work, that bus over that has to be barricaded, it's where we'll be staked out until it comes."

Surprisingly, Max didn't need any further prompting, and she set off to collect metal around the junkyard. Steve watched her walk off, left with more questions than answers. He sighed, his eyes trailing over to the car where Lucas and Dustin were hiding out with some annoyance.

It didn't matter at this moment he thought, if he got the chance to ask her about Billy later then he would, but for now he had bigger things to worry about.

Steve picked up a metal folding chair nearby, hoisting it up without much effort and walked over to the boys hideout. He could feel Max watching him as he slammed the chair against the side of the car, startling both Lucas and Dustin.

"Hey! Dickheads! How come the only one helping me is this random girl?" he reprimanded them, "We lose light in 40 minutes, let's go!"

THE SILENCE OF the night was ripped through by the beast's ungodly roar, it's throaty gurgle causing a shiver down Steve's spine as he and Dustin whip around to peer out the small grated window. The horrible sound echoed across the darkened junkyard, and it seemed as if it's call disturbed the low hanging fog itself as it shifted and moved at an ominously slow pace.

"Do you see it?" Dustin breathed out, his eyes glancing back and forth.

From their vantage point, the fog was too thick to see through it. "No," replied Steve, he too trying to find the creature.

Another cry rang out, it's closeness putting Steve on edge.

"Lucas!" Dustin called out to his friend above, "What's going on?"

Steve had half a mind to tell Lucas and Max to get back down into the bus, but he knew they had a better scope of the area than they did. Lucas called back and told them to hold on.

The night fell eerily quiet again. They collectively held their breath, waiting for Lucas' signal. Steve could feel his heart beginning to race, either from anticipation or fear, he couldn't quite tell.

He saw the shift of movement in the distance before Lucas began shouting.

"Ten o'clock!" Lucas' voice cracked, "Te-ten o'clock!"

Steve pointed at the stooped shadowy figure, "There."

Dustin followed to where Steve was pointing, and they both immediately noted the oddity in the creatures movement. It was swaying back and forth, as if trying to decide if it wanted to move or not.

"What's he doing?" Dustin asked, frowning with confusion.

"I don't know," Steve muttered under his breath, just as perturbed as

Dustin. "He's not taking the bait. Why is he not taking the bait?"

"Maybe he's not hungry?" Dustin suggested, his eyes unmoving from Dart.

A sudden thought struck Steve then. A dangerous thought with an even more dangerous solution. "Or maybe... he's sick of cow meat."

Steve hovered away from the window, rising slowly to his feet. The longer they stayed there like sitting ducks, the more danger they would be in. Steve knew this, he knew that if they tried to outplay the Demogorgon in it's waiting game, they would lose one way or another. But he didn't want to go out there, he didn't want to come face to face with the creature, he didn't want to get hurt, he didn't want to *die*, *he didn't want to die* - But when Dustin turned away from the window, when Steve saw the concern that was laid over every inch of his face, he knew he had to confront the beast head on. He had to, for Lucas and Max, for Dustin.

He had to protect these little shits, even if it meant risking his own life. He wouldn't forgive himself if something happened to one of them.

Without any more hesitation, Steve's body moved of its own accord. He grabbed his bat, it's weight comforting in his grasp, and he made to move towards the bus doors with long, steady strides.

"Steve?" Dustin asked, watching Steve move about the small space. "Steve? Steve! What are you doing?!"

The senior turned, fishing the lighter out of his pocket and tossing it to Dustin. "Just get ready," Steve told him, tacking on a reassuring smirk for good measure.

With that, Steve took one last, steadying breath and stepped out into the chilly night.

The moment his foot made contact with the damp ground, his mind went on auto-pilot. He didn't allow himself to think, but rather to move on instinct. He took cautious steps forward, crouched low as he swung the bat below his waist, slicing through the fog. Vaguely

aware of the murmur of voices and movement from the bus, he stalked over to the meat pile, his eyes trained on the unmoving, fog covered creature.

Steve hadn't taken notice of when the taunting began, but as the challenging words flowed from his lips, his voice rose higher and higher, beckoning the thing to come out. He was nearly a foot away from the pile when the creature finally came forward, creeping out of the fog.

For the first time, Steve finally was able to see what he was up against.

The creature was unusually gangly, with long limbs that easily could measure up to half Steve's height. It's indistinguishable reptilian-like skin glistened with a slick sheen, almost rippling with every slight movement it made. But Steve wasn't fixated on the abnormal looking body, but rather it's all too familiar shaped head. It was just like the head of the first Demogorgon he came face to face with, it's nightmarish flower petal like folds twitching and pulsating, with thick oozing saliva dripping out from its mouth and onto the grass.

The thing shifted on its legs, and Steve could make out its pointed tail, and an odd yellowish marking that was situated between it's hips.

From behind, he heard Lucas screaming, "Steve! Steve watch out!"

"I'm kinda busy here," he shouted back, his focus honed in.

"Three o'clock! THREE O'CLOCK!"

Steve huffed, but he tore his eyes away over to his left and froze, nearly dropping his bat in horror.

There were more.

He whipped his head around, taking in just how many of the creatures at gathered around him, circling him.

Trapping him.

He heard the sound of the bus doors slamming open, the sound of Dustin screaming at him to come back inside. He must have been more outnumbered than he realized. Steve heard the low gurgled growl, and he looked up just in time to see Dart advancing towards him, its face opening up to reveal jagged rows of teeth.

Steve takes no time to scramble out of the way, crashing into the hood of a nearby car. He tumbles over the hood, rolling off on the other side just as different Demogorgon launches passed him.

He landed on his feet, a little shaken, but not enough to slow him down. One more creature tries to knock him down, and Steve swings his bat, the nails connecting with its head with a sickening crunch. It falls to the ground, and Steve takes the opportunity to sprint back to bus. He hears the creatures running after him as he falls inside, narrowly avoiding a collision with the kids as he rushes to pull the doors closed.

He quickly grabs one of the metal sheets positioned over the front windows and pushes it against the doors for extra support. From outside, the monsters continuously ram against the barricades, trying to claw their way inside.

Suddenly, the whole bus rocks, throwing everyone off their balance. Steve stumbles down as he loses his footing, and one of the Demogorgons manage to bust through, claws slashing at anything it can reach. The kids scream as they run to the other side of the bus, and Steve rushes to grab his discarded bat, swinging down as hard as he can at it.

The bus rocks again, but this time it comes from above them. The metal roof dents inwards as it stomps along. Steve manages to beat the Demogorgon out of the hole it created, and his moment of relief instantly dissolves when he hears Max scream. He scrambles his way up one more time, making a mad dash over to the kids.

He runs into Max, forcing her back and out of the way, and positions himself between the Demogorgon and them.

“You gotta get through me first, motherfucker!” Steve shouts, gripping the bat in both hands, ready to strike.

The Demogorgon roars, it's flower head wide open, moving to pounce. But then the beast suddenly recoils, taking several steps away. Steve watches it rear its head to the side, letting out an ungodly loud roar before jumping off the bus.

He doesn't move for several minutes, waiting and listening for any sign of the creatures, but all he heard was the herd screeching and running in the distance. He took several tentative steps forward before moving to the bus doors, pulling them open with a tug. Sticking out the bat first, Steve peeks outside, checking to see if the coast is clear. He doesn't immediately see anything, the fog moving undisturbed now as he takes a step down.

He figures the kids probably followed, Lucas' voice sounding closer than Steve thought it was, "What... was that?"

Steve noticed that none of the Demogorgons were there anymore, all of them having ran off together.

"I don't know..." he heard Max say.

But why would they all just suddenly up and leave?

"Steve scared them off?" Dustin piped up.

Unless... something called them away.

"No," Steve said, straightening up and lowering the bat. "No, they're going somewhere."

"But where though?" Lucas asked. They all peered in the direction the creatures ran off, staring right into the forest.

"I don't know," Steve murmured. "I don't know."

9. Reunion

Summary for the Chapter:

“He’s an asshole,” she went on, not really noticing Steve’s lack of words. “He only cares about himself and working out and he hates everyone pretty much.”

Then she eyes him curiously as she backtracks, “Well, almost everyone.”

~

“I don’t wanna hurt you baby,” Billy tells him, his voice low and laced with a threatening honesty, as if he was trying to keep a secret from the rest of the world, “So stay the fuck out of my way.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Please excuse my sudden absence, I took a tiny break from writing to celebrate my birthday, which was on Monday, and to also start my classes back up, which was also on Monday. This chapter was a doozy to write, mostly because I had to really only pick out some key scenes, otherwise this chapter would be near 10,000 words long @.@ But buckle up friends, we're on our last leg of all the canon events!

Thank you for the comments and kudos and the general reads! I kind of proof-read this, so all mistakes are my own.

- Dave

Chapter Title: "Reunion" - M83

WHEN STEVE DETERMINED that the coast was clear, the party picked up any belongings that they had brought, save for Lucas’ bike, which Steve promised he would come back and get, and set off

towards the treeline.

“Are you sure this is a good idea?” Max asked, trailing behind Steve as he shone his flashlight through the trees. “What if those things are still out here?”

Steve didn’t answer immediately, his eyes scanning the darkness. He didn’t know if the Demogorgons were out here or not, but he knew for certain that they couldn’t stay in that bus all night. “If they’re still out here, you guys run and I’ll fend them off,” he said seriously.

“We can’t just leave you out here!” Lucas protested beside Max. Steve noticed that ever since they left the junkyard, the pair had been almost less than a foot apart from each other.

He heard Dustin beginning to protest as well, and Steve turned to the kids, shining the flashlight in their faces. “Like hell you will! I’m not about to let one of you die on me, so if those creatures come back *you will run* . Do you all understand me?”

He waited until they all begrudgingly agreed with the nod of their heads. Steve didn’t allow any more room for argument as he turned on his heels and continued through the forest. Eventually, they were able to make their way to the old tracks. Steve inspected the ground, finding that the chunks of meat he and Dustin had left were gone.

He let out a breath of relief, thankful that there was one less thing that would attract the Demogorgons to them.

“Looks like Dart and his buddies have been through here,” Dustin called out, flashing his own light towards the ground. Steve walked over to where he stood, coming to find another heap of shredded skin. Steve grimaced at the sight, looking up in favor of the stretch of tracks.

“Our best bet is to probably follow the tracks back,” Steve determined, glancing back at Max and Lucas.

“How do you know Dart was with them?” Lucas asked Dustin.

“Because the one that came out first had the same exact yellow pattern on his butt,” Dustin concluded.

Max interjected, confused, “But wasn’t he tiny two days ago?”

“Well, he’s molted three times already.”

“When’s he gonna molt again?”

“It’s gotta be soon,” Dustin figured. “When he does, he’ll be fully grown, or close to it. And so will his friends.”

“Yeah, and he’s gonna eat a lot more than just cats,” Steve said offhandedly, a little louder than he had meant to.

“Wait, a cat?” asked Lucas, horrified.

“Dart ate a cat?” Max repeated his question, looking between Steve and Dustin.

Dustin tried to make a recovery, “No, what? No - “

Didn’t they already know about the cat incident Steve pondered, confused by Dustin’s reaction, “What are you talking about? He ate Mews.”

“Mews? Who’s Mews?” Max inquired, becoming increasingly concerned.

“It’s Dustin’s cat.”

“Steve!”

“I knew it!” Lucas exploded, getting into Dustin’s face. “You kept him!”

“No! No. No, I... No, I...” Dustin was at a loss for words, and he huffed angrily before giving in. “He missed me. He wanted to come home.”

“Bullshit!” Lucas exclaimed, prodding Dustin in the chest.

“I didn’t know he was a Demogorgon, okay?”

The bickering continued, and Steve had half a mind to zone out of the whole thing when he heard something in distance. He turned,

unable to make out what the noise was or where it was coming from. “Guys...?” he started, whipping his flashlight around.

“I care! You put the party in jeopardy! You broke the rule of law!”

“So did you!”

“What?”

Steve couldn’t hear over the kids fighting, and he was growing increasingly frustrated and worried, “Guys...!”

“You told a stranger the truth!”

“Wha-? A stranger?”

“You wanted to tell her, too!”

“Yeah, okay, but I didn’t Lucas! I didn’t - “

“GUYS!” Steve finally yelled, and immediately the trio shut up, turning their wide eyes to look directly at Steve. With it finally being quiet, Steve could tell that the noise he was hearing was a chorus of low, unearthly screeching.

The kids picked up on the noise too, peering through the tree towards the source.

Steve held onto his bat in a vice grip and set off in the direction with haste. He didn’t wait up for them as he went, knowing that they would follow. He could hear Max calling after them in protest, but after another couple moments, Max was trailing behind them.

It didn’t take long until they broke out into a small clearing that overlooked the forest and parts of the town.

“Where are they?” Steve asked, a little breathless.

When the kids caught up to him, Lucas pulled out his binoculars and scoured the area. The screeching echoed throughout the forest again, the sound sending a shiver down Steve’s spine.

“The lab,” Lucas said a moment later, moving the binoculars away from his face. He stretched his hand out to point in the general area, and Steve spotted the rooftop of the facility.

“They weren’t running away,” Dustin awed, stare unwavering.

“They were going home,” Lucas finished for him.

STEVE WAS ABOUT to kick another pebble across the pavement when Max walked up to him, her feet moving with a cautious determination.

They all had made the trek to get to the lab, still wary about the possibility of running into the Demogorgons, and when they had made it through the treeline, they were shocked to find Nancy and Jonathan just outside the closed gates. Steve tried to say as little as possible to them, and he hung back whenever they all were trying to get the gates open. Dustin somehow managed to get them open, and Steve agreed to stay behind with the kids as Nancy and Jonathan drove up to the lab to see what was going on.

Ever since, Steve was quiet, idly kicking small stones and twigs, lost in his thoughts. He looked up from what he was doing, surprised to see that it was just Max coming over to him. A slight lean over and he could see Dustin and Lucas near the lab’s entrance, whispering between themselves about something or the other.

“Hey,” she said, plopping down a few feet away from where Steve stood.

Steve nodded in greeting, kicking the pebble before joining her on the ground. “How’re you holding up?” he had to ask.

She shrugged. “I don’t know. I still can’t believe any of this is happening really. It’s like something out of some weird science fiction movie or something.”

Steve chuckled. "Trust me, I was in the same boat when I saw a Demogorgon for the first time."

"What did you do?" she asked curiously.

The memory still wasn't a fond one, and it involved some people he didn't really want to think about at the moment. But, after all the shit she's been going through, Steve figured she'd would like the truth.

"Well, I was on my way to apologize to Jonathan, the guy who was here earlier, because I was a dick and beat the shit out of him," Steve began.

Max laughed, causing him to pause. "That sounds like Billy, except for the apologizing part."

The mere mention of his name caused Steve's heart to stutter, "Billy? As in Billy Hargrove?"

"Yeah, he's my step brother."

Oh.

Oh.

"Oh," was all Steve could respond with.

"He's an asshole," she went on, not really noticing Steve's lack of words. "He only cares about himself and working out and he hates everyone pretty much."

Then she eyes him curiously as she backtracks, "Well, almost everyone."

Well, almost everyone.

His eyes widen only a fraction, but it's enough for her to notice as she breaks out into a smirk. And, despite the fact that they were step siblings, that smirk was incredibly uncannily similar to Billy's.

He makes a mental note to talk to her about her step brother in the future, but for now he went on with his story. "Anyway, I go to

Jonathan's house to apologize to him, and when I get there I find Nancy with him and the entire house is a wreck. Nancy warns me to leave, hell even pulls a gun on me, and then the monster falls through the ceiling. The thing escapes and they tell me to leave and I run out of the house and back to my car.

Then I realized how much of a baby I was being, and that I needed to man up and help them kill that thing. So I go back inside, and the thing is on top of Jonathan about to eat his face off. I grab Jonathan's baseball bat and I hit the shit out of the thing. We eventually get it into a trap and we burn it alive. To this day, we still don't exactly know where it went."

"So you're saying it could still be out there?" Max asks, her tone shifting to something a little frightened.

"No, no. Like, when the thing was on fire, it just... turned to dust really. We don't know if we truly killed it or if it just went back to where it came from," Steve explained, and Max visibly relaxed.

"That's nuts," she finally says.

"It was," Steve chuckles. "But I couldn't just let themselves possibly get killed, you know? I needed to help them."

Max nodded. "That's actually why I came over here. Well, partly. I'm getting kinda tired of being out of the loop." She nudges her head over to Dustin and Lucas. "But I just wanted to say thanks. For uh, everything... and for not letting us die and... whatever."

Steve smiles softly, knowing that the gratitude was genuine, even if it was a little awkward. He reaches over and ruffled the top of her head, and immediately her usual demeanor comes back as she bats his hand away.

"Speaking of them though," Steve changes the subject, "What's up with you and Lucas?"

Max's eyebrows raise almost to her hairline, and she sputters, "W-what are you talking about? There's nothing up with me and him! He's just a weird little stalker."

“Uh-huh,” Steve nods, knowing better. “Figured I would just ask.” What he really wanted to ask was if there was something weird between Lucas and Billy, but he decided against it. He didn’t want to open something he shouldn’t, so he left the conversation there.

Suddenly, Steve heard the sound of engines revving, and he was immediately on his feet, Max as well. They were next to Dustin and Lucas in a heartbeat, watching down the road for any sign of Jonathan’s car. Within seconds, the car appeared, and Steve realized quick enough just how fast he was driving as he shouted and pulled the kids back.

The car barreled past, and then another car came into view, coming to a quick stop in front of them. The passenger door opened, and to their surprise, it was Chief Hopper in the driver’s seat.

“Get in the car!” he nearly shouts, moving to pull the passenger seat down so the kids could climb into the back.

They didn’t waste any time, Steve ushering them inside the vehicle before climbing in himself and shutting the door. Hopper shifted the car out of park and they all lurched forward, speeding off down the road.

Steve dared to peer into the side mirror, his blood running cold as he caught just the briefest glimpse of a four legged creature darting across the road far behind them.

STEVE KICKS AROUND the pile Hopper made earlier, looking for the heaters that the man said were there. He picks up one right as Nancy shines her flashlight on it and sets it to the side.

In just a few short hours, enough disagreeable things had happened to make Steve’s head hurt. He didn’t like the idea of essentially burning Will alive to eject this weird virus out of his system, having to watch him convulse and being interrogated was bad enough,

because he's just a kid like c'mon, but at this point it was either that or have him actually die. And, even though he's only truly known her for a total of maybe thirty minutes, Steve definitely did not like the idea of Eleven going into that lab to close whatever these gates were. Those Demogorgon Demo-dog things were still probably swarming the place, and even though the Demo-dog that got thrown through the window was evidence enough that she can handle herself against them, it still made Steve worry. He knew Hopper didn't want her to, and Mike sure as hell didn't want her to either, but those weren't his battles to handle.

Steve pinches the bridge of his nose, trying to will the headache away but to no avail. He wanted nothing more than to rest, but he knew he wouldn't be able to until he knew everyone was safe.

"Steve?"

He looks up, the sound of Nancy's voice causing him to be alert. "Yeah?"

She shakes her head, "Nothing, I just..."

He sighs internally. Steve knows what's coming, he knows what she's going to say, but honestly he doesn't want to hear any of it. He's still having to process everything that's been happening this evening, and having to also deal with this, whatever this thing is between them now, needs to be set on the back burner.

She stops rummaging around to look directly at Steve. "I just... what you did, um, helping the kids, that was really cool."

Steve suppresses a smirk, "Yeah. Those little shits are real trouble, you know?"

"Believe me, I know," she sighs.

He picks up another heater. "You should go with him."

Nancy looks at him, confused. "What?"

"With Jonathan."

“No, I’m... I’m not just gonna leave Mike.”

Steve looks at her then, “No one is leaving anyone. I may be a shitty boyfriend, but...,” he smirks, “Turns out I’m a pretty damn good babysitter.”

“Steve...” Nancy doesn’t know what to say to him, and Steve just shakes his head.

“It’s okay Nance,” he assures her, because really, it was okay.

He picks up the heaters he’s collected and begins walking to the front of the house. He hears Nancy not too far behind him, and they round the side of the house to meet with Hopper, Eleven, Jonathan and Joyce. Steve gets the heaters packed into the Byer’s car, and he soon finds himself leaning on the front door with the kids on the porch, watching the two cars take off down the road.

When the cars are out of sight, Steve claps his hands to catch their attention. “Alright, let’s get inside and clean up the mess in the living room.”

He hears a chorus of groans, but he steps aside as they all file suit into the house. As soon as they’re all inside, they pair off: Max and Lucas work on sweeping up the glass, Steve and Dustin pick work on getting the Demo-dog out, while Mike paces back and forth.

Steve isn’t sure why Dustin wants to keep the dead Demo-dog, something about documenting a scientific discovery, but Steve complies and hastily carries the carcass into the kitchen. He tells Dustin to get the fridge door for him, and when he does Steve tries to shove the thing onto one of the shelves. He ends up knocking food onto the floor in the process, but he eventually gets it far enough inside and Dustin shuts the door on it.

Steve pats Dustin on the top of his head, “Good work.”

There’s a commotion going on in the living room, but he only really pays attention when Dustin yells, “Demo-dogs!” in the direction of the living room.

“The chief will take care of her,” they hear Lucas saying as they walk

into the room. Steve looks between him and Mike, already aware of what exactly they were talking about.

“Listen, dude, a coach calls a play in a game, bottom line, you execute it. Alright?” Steve tries to get through to the kid.

“Okay, first of all, this isn’t some stupid sports game,” Mike edges out. “And second, we’re not even in the game. We’re on the bench.”

“So my point is...” Actually, wait, he’s right Steve realizes. He tries to figure out something to say but nothing comes. “Right, yeah, we’re on the bench, so, uh, there’s nothing we can do.”

Dustin speaks up, “That’s not entirely true. I mean, these demo-dogs, they have a hive mind. When they ran away from the bus, they were called away.”

“So if we get their attention...” Lucas starts.

Max finishes, “Maybe we can draw them from the lab.”

“Clear a path to the gate,” Mike whispers.

“Yeah and then we all die,” Steve deadpans, unbelieving that they’re actually having this conversation right now.

Dustin comes back with a quip that Steve wants to smack him upside the head for, “That’s one point of view.”

“That’s not a point of view, man. That’s a fact.”

Mike walks past them, staring along the colored in map on the walls, and the party follows. Mike finds what he’s looking for as he points at a part of the map, “This is where the chief dug his hole. This is our way into the tunnel.”

He hustles back into the living room, and they crowd around another spot, “This right here is like a hub. So you got all the tunnels feeding in here. Maybe if we set this on fire - “

Set this on fire ? Steve interjects, “Uh, yeah, that’s a no.” However, none of the kids are listening as they continue on, talking over each

other.

“The mind layer would call away his army.”

“They’d all come to stop us.”

Steve tries to get their attention.

“We circle back to the exit.”

“By the time they realize we’re gone - “

“El would be at the gate.”

Steve claps his hands again, louder than he did before, “This, this is not happening.”

Mike tries to defend the plan, “But - “

The senior doesn’t let him continue, “No, no, no, no, no. No buts. I promised I’d keep you shitheads safe, and that’s exactly what I plan on. We’re staying here. On the bench. And we’re waiting for the starting team to do their job. Does everybody understand that?”

“This isn’t a stupid sports game,” Mike repeats, only irritating Steve more.

“I said does everybody understand that?” he demands once more. “I need a yes.”

Steve never did get a unanimous agreement, because the sound of an engine revving caught all of their attention.

Steve’s eyes narrowed, who could possibly be coming towards the Byers this late in the night? Surely it wasn’t Hopper and Eleven or Joyce and them. The other kids seemed to be just as confused, but it was Max who was racing to the window, crouching down low to peer outside. Lucas follows closely behind, and they all wait for either of them to speak.

He’ll never forget the dread in her voice when she spoke next, nor the way he could hear his heart pounding in his ears when he realized

what she meant.

“My brother... He can’t know I’m here. He’ll kill me. He’ll kill us.”

Headlights flood the living room. Steve knew he had to go out there and try to get Billy to leave, but Steve sure as hell didn’t want to confront him like that. A quick glance around the living room told him that he didn’t have a choice, they couldn’t risk having another person stumbling into this whole mess, they couldn’t risk having the kids be in harm’s way because of Billy. Billy needed to go.

Steve needed Billy to go.

“Stay out of sight,” Steve says, his feet taking him to the front door. “And whatever you do, do *not* come outside. Clear?” The kids all nod.

He takes a deep breath as his hand grips the door handle, exhaling as he swings it open. Steve’s met with chilly air dancing across his skin, and he has to suppress a shiver as he stands on the porch, his gaze unwavering on Billy’s car. From where he stood, he could hear the hum of the rock music playing.

He needs to look calm, collected. The slightest indication of something being up could cost him. Confident. Confident. Act like nothing’s wrong. He’s just dropping by the Byers, there’s nothing special about that is there?

Steve puts his hands on his hips. Maybe that’ll make him look more cool.

The headlights shut off.

He watches Billy climb out, the motion fluid and swift. Steve feels his heart beating faster at the sight of the junior and curses mentally. Billy’s got a cigarette burning from his lips, and he reaches up to take a drag.

“Am I dreaming,” Billy starts, smoke billowing out, “Or is that you, Harrington?”

Steve almost panics, trying to figure out how to respond.

“Yeah, it’s me,” he ends up saying, “Don’t cream your pants.”

Nailed it.

He watches Billy take off his jacket, revealing his completely unbuttoned shirt and bare chest. If they weren’t in this situation right now, Steve might have even chanced a once over.

Billy stuffs the jacket into the car, and Steve realizes that he’s walking out to Billy now. They meet halfway, coming to stand several feet away from each other.

“What’re you doin’ here amigo?” Billy asks challengingly, taking another drag.

“I could ask you the same thing,” Steve responds, tacking on, “*Amigo.*”

He knows it’s wrong, but Steve couldn’t help but wonder if Billy was out tonight. He’s dressed the best Steve’s ever seen him, and he could even smell the cologne Billy was wearing.

“Looking for my stepsister,” Billy tells him. “A little birdie told me she was here.”

Steve tries to play it off like he didn’t already know Max now, “Huh, that’s weird. I don’t know her.”

He notices the way Billy’s eyes flicker towards the house for less than a second as he describes her, “Small? Rides a stupid skateboard? Bit of a bitch.”

Steve tries not to glare at the description, “Doesn’t ring a bell. Sorry, buddy.”

Billy chuckles a little darkly, his head tilting down as he takes the cigarette out of his mouth. “You know, I don’t know, this... This whole situation, Harrington, I don’t know.” Billy stalks closer to him, dangerously closer. “It’s giving me the heebie-jeebies.”

“Oh, yeah? Why’s that?” Steve asks, trying to be careful to not stutter.

Billy shrugs nonchalantly, his face growing more and more disgusted as he speaks, "Yesterday you're asking me all these questions about my 13-year-old sister. Next, she goes missing all day today. And then I find her, with *you*, in a stranger's house. And you *lie* to me about it."

Steve forces a laugh, "Man, were you dropped on the head as a child or what?" The way Billy grins then, licking his teeth like an animal, does something to Steve, but he continues on acting like he's unfazed. "I don't know what you don't understand about what I just said. She's not here."

Billy takes his last drag, and he leans in close enough that if Steve wanted to, he could kiss him. And his next words were spoken so calmly that Steve's blood runs cold.

"Then who is that?"

He whips his head around and immediately spots the kids in the window just as their disappearing from sight.

Fuck.

He turns back, tries to explain, "Oh shit. Listen -- "

But Billy catches him off his guard, shoving Steve hard in the chest. Steve falls onto his back with a thud, his world spinning as he attempts to get up. Billy flicks away his cigarette as he kneels down beside Steve. He grabs him by the shirt and hoists him upwards.

"I don't wanna hurt you baby," Billy tells him, his voice low and laced with a threatening honesty, as if he was trying to keep a secret from the rest of the world, "So stay the fuck out of my way."

He shoves Steve down again, and this time Steve hits his head on the ground. He sees a dizzying flash of white in his eyes as he groans. Pain flowers out from his head, stunning him into a momentary stillness. There's a ringing in his ears, but even he could hear the way the front door slams closed.

You need to get up --

Steve tries to turn onto his side, nearly crumbling back down.

Get up, get up, get up --

He tries again, his legs shaking as he slowly rises.

Getupgetupgetupgogogogogo --

He trudges forward, his head making him wince, but his body is telling him to keep going, to not stop, he can't stop, he mustn't stop, he needs to get inside, *get inside*. His blood rushes with each step he takes, the thought of keeping the kids safe keeping him on his feet.

Steve doesn't know how he makes it to the porch, but when he does he shoves open the front door right as the sound of a collision rings out in the house. He sees Mike, Dustin and Max, but Lucas and Billy are nowhere in sight.

He follows the noise and rushes into the dining room, and the sight of Billy cornering Lucas has his last little bit of energy surge through his veins.

"That's it, you're dead Sinclair," Billy growls at the boy, and he's moving to attack when Steve shoves him out of the way.

Billy spins on his feet, coming to face Steve with a brief look of surprise.

"No, you are," Steve says, and that's all the warning he gives as he pulls his arm back and punches Billy right across the jaw.

Steve's fist is throbbing as Billy tumbles back and keels over, but the junior is only down for a moment before he straightens back up, laughing maniacally.

"Looks like you got some fire in you after all, huh?" Billy taunts, his grin unusually wide. "I've been waiting to meet this King Steve everybody's been telling me so much about."

Steve doesn't take the bait. He knows Lucas is safe and away from the junior, and that's all he cares about. Steve reaches up and prods Billy in the chest, nudging him backwards, "Get out."

There's a beat of silence, and Billy has this strange look on his face,

and his swing is so sudden that Steve barely misses, ducking down to avoid contact with Billy's own fist.

Steve lands another blow on Billy's face, the junior falling back into the dining table and knocking it over. He's vaguely aware of the kids cheering them on like it's some kind of boxing match, and Steve uses his momentum to follow Billy.

He punches the junior again and again, and Steve manages to back Billy against the kitchen sink. Except he doesn't notice the way Billy stretches his hand out, reaching and grasping onto a plate. Billy smashes the plate against Steve's head, on the same spot where Steve hit his head outside.

The pain reemerges and Steve stumbles backwards, holding his head in his hands. He doesn't see Billy's left hook, and pain blossoms on the other side of Steve's face as he crashes into a bookshelf against the wall. Billy hits him again, this time forcing Steve downwards, and he then grabs Steve by the shoulders and shakes him. The senior can barely hear him, barely hanging onto his consciousness.

"No one tells me what to do," Billy growls darkly, "Not even you."

Steve goes flying as Billy throws him into the living room.

He trips over the strewn out drawings, landing on his ass, and Billy is on him again in seconds, forcing him down onto the hard floorboards. Punch after rage infused punch come from the junior against Steve's temples.

He doesn't know when he slips under, and the last thing he remembers is the sight of the monster on top of him before he succumbs to a numbing darkness.

Notes for the Chapter:

I'd like to imagine that Max likes Steve and also takes pity on him for having to put up with Billy.

10. Marked Man

Summary for the Chapter:

“That *thing* that you’re looking at is just one of probably one of thirty or more killing machines from some other world,” Steve bit out. “The kids, including your *step sister* are on their way to distract these monsters from someone who is trying to close the gate they came out of, and if we don’t do anything, they all will get themselves killed. Now you can either stay here and keep out of my fucking way, or you can help me keep them safe.”

~

And then he heard something behind him. And then the smile on Billy’s face quickly turned into one of horror and desperation. And then Billy was shouting Steve’s name. And then, before he even got the chance to turn around, Steve was thrown down onto the ground, crushed by an unearthly weight.

Notes for the Chapter:

This chapter. THIS CHAPTER. This chapter sucked the life out of me. This is the chapter that will propel us into the next arc of this story, a mini finale if you will, as it also marks the end of the canon events. Sorry if it's shitty in some parts.

This is the longest chapter to date, so I beta'd it as best as I could. Any mistakes are of my own, and I will look this chapter over as soon as I can. I just found out like a couple of minutes ago that I'm going to be a freaking uncle so I might be MIA with my family for a bit.

Thanks to those who had read, commented and kudo'd, and as always, happy reading!

- Dave

Chapter Title: "Marked Man" - Mieka Pauley
(I highly recommend listening in the latter half of the chapter.)

THE FAINT RINGING in his ears roused him slowly, tendrils of consciousness trying to grasp him, shake him. His body was numbingly cold, but there was a strange warmth that radiated over his midsection, and midst the throbbing of his face, there was an unbearable foreign heat on both his cheeks.

His head was slightly shaking, but it wasn't of his own accord.

Soon, he became aware of his breathing, became aware of the hard surface under his body, aware of the light that seemed to peak through the darkness of the back of his eyelids. The light shifted, as if something was moving in front of him. Or was it above him?

Something told him that he needed to wake up, to open his eyes, to get up. But when he realized the commands weren't from his mind, rather from someone *speaking aloud* , his eyes fluttered open slowly.

At first, he couldn't see anything save for a blurry mass hovering over him. He knew this blurry mass, he was sure of it, and it continued to speak to him in a gravely hoarse tone.

"... are you alright... can you move... can you hear me... ?"

At any other point in time, he probably would have found this voice comforting, but it was because of the fact that he wasn't exactly sure what was going on or where he was that made him a bit cautious and concerned. The mass started to become clearer, the semblance of a masculine face forming, a face with a strong jawline and cheekbones, a face that was a little too close.

Weak arms rose, his hands coming to his own face to understand why his cheeks were so *hot* , and his fingers found the hands of another, their hands cupping his face.

He strained his eyes, his brows narrowing in attempt to clear out the least of the blurriness before him. The cloud eventually lifted, and for

a moment, Steve was confused.

“Billy?”

The junior was holding Steve’s head in his hands, his body hovering several inches above Steve’s body as he was leaning on his knees over his torso. There was some bruising along Billy’s face on either side, ones that Steve didn’t remember being there the last time he saw the younger man.

In fact, Steve couldn’t remember why he himself was on the floor, or how he got there in the first place, or why his face hurt so damn badly.

A wave of relief washed over Billy’s face, but Steve was instead looking around elsewhere. He quickly identified the area to be the Byer’s household, and soon bits and pieces of his memory came back to him.

Coming back to the house...

Interrogating Will...

The strange girl...

Being left with the kids...

... Billy showing up... coming inside the house... hitting... hitting...

Steve sucked in a sharp breath, his eyes widening.

Billy was going to hurt the kids, he was going to Lucas, Billy hurt him.

All at once, Steve shoved Billy off of him, surprising the junior as he fell to the floor beside Steve, and he pushed his way backwards to get as far away from him as possible. His back hit the front door painfully, and he couldn’t hold back the cry that escaped him.

The noise caught the attention of Billy, who was moving to get up. “Steve, you need to relax, you need to calm down -- “

But then Billy started towards him, and all Steve could think was how

the junior was going to pummel him again and knock him out for good this time and how he was going to hurt Max and Dustin and Mike and Lucas and his breath was heavy and Steve's own voice was ragged as he tried to speak for the first time since waking up.

"Don't you -- " his voice broke "Don't you f-fucking come near me Hargrove."

Something caused Billy to freeze where he stood, his features becoming mixed and pained.

"Steve," he tried to talk to him, tried to take another step forward, "I... I'm not going to hurt you -- "

"I SAID DON'T FUCKING COME NEAR ME," Steve shouted, scaring himself and Billy. His breath hiccuped and stuttered, and his vision became blurry again, and he didn't know why until he felt tears slowly streaming down his face.

Fuck.

Steve was glaring down at the floor, trying to even out his breathing as best as he could before he started hyperventilating. He didn't even know why he was crying, mixtures of hatred and fear and regret and tiredness and uncertainty were all prevalent in his mind, in his features. It was in the way his whole body was now shaking, how he pressed himself against the door; he was hurt in ways he didn't even realize. He was hurt in ways he probably shouldn't have been in the first place.

There was a noise out in front of him, and Steve shifted his teary eyes to glare at Billy. He had taken several steps back, thankfully putting more distance between them. But there was yet another strange look on Billy's face, one that spoke its own volumes, one that suggested Billy was having his own internal struggle right now.

But Steve didn't give a shit. Every thought of Billy was met with a seething memory of Billy punching his lights out, attacking him, the kids.

The kids .

The thought of the kids had Steve staggering up, sobering up, and calling out their names brokenly to an empty house.

"They're not here," Billy supplied for him, which only earned another teary glare from Steve.

"Then where the fuck are they, Hargrove?"

"I don't know! When I woke up, they were already gone."

"When you woke up?"

Billy gestured to a syringe on the floor, "Max got me in the neck with that thing and I passed out afterward."

Steve's hiccups finally ceased as he used his sleeves to wipe his eyes, his brows furrowed together, staring down at the syringe. They was the same syringe that Joyce and Hopper used to sedate Will, and it was completely empty he noted.

Max had used the entire dosage on Billy.

An entire dosage apparently kept Will out for hours at a time.

"How long were you out?" Steve asked slowly.

Billy blinked, not picking up on what Steve was thinking, "I dunno, maybe twenty minutes?"

The answer caused Steve to look at the junior with an unrivaled shock. *Twenty minutes?* How could something that was supposed to keep someone unconscious for hours on end only keep Billy unconscious for twenty minutes? If it worked like it was supposed to, then they would be already be seeing everyone arriving back to the house, already having closed the gates.

"What's the matter?" Billy asked, chancing another step.

"Don't," Steve warned again, holding his ground, pointing at the junior. "Just stay right fucking there and don't fucking move."

Billy didn't say a word, but for some reason he complied. Steve

casted aside the strangeness of the dosage not affecting Billy in favor of finding the kids. His tired eyes flickered over to the spot in the map where Mike had said the tunnels connected. It was the same spot Hopper had described to them on the way to the Byer's house earlier. He'd described the general way to get there, and that and the map was all Steve needed to get to the site.

He had no clue where else the kids would be, and he hated how they didn't listen to a word he said about not going there.

Steve didn't say a word to Billy as he turned and opened the front door, stepping out into the night. The first thing Steve realized was that Billy's car was missing, and the thought of them illegally driving was enough to have him freaking out a little bit. Thankfully, Joyce's car was still there, and Steve could drive it to the spot they were surely at.

There was a breath on the back of his neck, and he jumped out of his skin as he spun around. Billy was less than foot away, but his attention wasn't on Steve as he stared at the empty space his car used to occupy.

"Those fuckers stole my car," Billy muttered in disbelief, mostly to himself. "They actually stole my fucking car."

"They had to get to the tunnels somehow," Steve snapped, shoving past Billy to look for Joyce's keys.

Billy followed after him as he scoured the living room, "What tunnels?"

Steve huffed. He didn't have time for this or for Billy. He needed to get to them before they did something stupid, or worse, get themselves killed. "You wouldn't believe me even if I told you," he grumbled, picking up a set of car keys from the living room table.

Billy walked over and snatched up the keys from his hands. "Try me, Harrington."

Steve glared at him, his patience wearing incredibly thin. "Open the fridge."

The junior didn't understand, "What are you -- "

"I said," Steve repeated, his tone dark, "Open the fucking fridge."

Billy didn't say anything further as he made his way to the kitchen, with Steve following closely behind. He only stopped several feet away when Billy gripped the fridge handle, and he was sure what exactly he was expecting when Billy opened the door and the dead Demo-dog fell out haphazardly at his feet. But what he wasn't expecting was Billy to be straight faced, his eyes trained unmoving from the thing as Steve explained what he was looking at.

"That *thing* that you're looking at is just one of probably one of thirty or more killing machines from some other world," Steve bit out. "The kids, including *your step sister* are on their way to distract these monsters from someone who is trying to close the gate they came out of, and if we don't do anything, they all will get themselves killed. Now you can either stay here and keep out of my fucking way, or you can help me keep them safe."

Steve hadn't realized he was stepping towards Billy until they were several inches away from each other. Billy looked up from the beast to bore his eyes into Steve's, and it was an intense feeling that Steve understood way too much. It was a look of disbelief, a look of uncertainty and denial and surprise and it was all the same things Steve has felt before. Except Steve knew just how grave the danger was, and how serious and important it was to get to the kids before they descended into the tunnels.

"The choice is yours," Steve told him, his voice unwavering. "But you need to make it now."

Billy looked like he wanted to refuse, like he wanted to tell Steve he was crazy and out of his mind, but another glance towards the dead Demo-dog seemed to convince him otherwise.

"Fine," Billy gave in, "Fine. As long as I'm there with you."

Steve narrowed his eyes, "This is the last time you'll be with me Hargrove. After this stunt you pulled tonight, I want absolutely nothing to do with you. And if I see you fucking with Lucas again, I

will not hesitate to fight you, do you understand me?"

Billy looked taken aback, and he made to protest and to defend himself, but he visibly deflated, "Alright."

Steve noted how easily he gave in, but he didn't question it as he snatched the keys back from Billy. He was halfway to the door before he told the junior to get a move on, and the incident with the syringe was still nagging at the back of his mind.

IT TOOK STEVE an incredible amount of time to reassure them all that Billy wasn't going to hurt them, and was in fact just here to help.

Steve was standing in between Billy and Max, Dustin, Mike, and Lucas, who, at the sight of Billy, all had grabbed a weapon of some sort and threatened to hurt the junior. Steve knew that Billy was unfazed by it all, but he stayed behind Steve and didn't say a single word as Steve explained to the kids that everything would be fine.

"He's just here to make sure that none of you get attacked by one of the Demo-dogs," Steve assured.

"Wait," Lucas interjected, "How does he know about the Demo-dogs?"

"Because I showed him the one I shoved into the fridge for Dustin."

"Steve!" it was Dustin's turn to interject, "You broke the rules! No telling an outsider about what's going on!"

Mike huffed then, pointing to Max accusingly, "Oh yeah, then why's she know?"

Max was about to defend herself, but Steve beat her to it as he snapped at Mike, "Hey! Whatever beef you have with this girl needs to end right now, you got it? I don't know what she did to piss you off this much, but she's in it now and you need to get over it."

Steve hadn't meant to say it so harshly, but it seemed to get the point across as Mike immediately backed down, choosing to instead stare at the dirt on the ground. Steve's eyes found Max's, her face in slight awe, and they traveled from his to behind him. And it donned on him that she was looking at Billy, so he shifted a little to look at the junior as well. He startled a little when he saw that Billy was staring intensely at him, his face untelling in his emotions.

Steve quirked an eyebrow and became defensive, "What?"

But Billy didn't say anything, rather he just shook his head.

Steve spun back around, putting his focus back onto the kids. "Look, I'm just going to ignore the fact that all of you disobeyed me in coming here. But, I made myself clear, we are not going down there right now. There's no chance we're going to that hole, all right?"

"Steve, you're upset, I get it," Dustin started, "But the bottom line is, a party member requires assistance, and it is our duty to provide that assistance. Now, I know you promised Nance that you would keep us safe," Dustin started to back away, and he pulled out Steve's bat from the Camaro's trunk, as well as a couple of bandanas and goggles, "So, keep us safe. And, if you can keep him from attacking us again, he can keep us safe too."

Steve looked at the items with disbelief, there was not a chance in hell he was going to go along with all of this. But the pleading look on Dustin's face was all that it took for Steve to take the items with a sigh.

The kid grinned from ear to ear, and Steve took the chance to lay down some ground rules. "Alright, we don't know what we are going to be up against, so I'm going to take the lead. Under no circumstances will any of you wander off on your own, Hargrove will be at the end to make sure of that. We get in, get to the tunnel's center, light the son of a bitch on fire and we get the hell out of there. Are we clear?"

They all repeated back the clear, and Steve nodded triumphantly before turning back to Billy. He handed the junior a pair of goggles and a bandana. He had been shifting from one foot to another, and it

was obvious that he wanted to say something, anything, but there was something keeping Billy at bay. Steve had a feeling he knew what it was too, but he didn't feel the desire to comment on it.

"If you're going down there, you need to wear these over your eyes and mouth," Steve told him seriously. "We don't know what the conditions are going to be like down there, so it's better to be safe than sorry. And, I swear to God, if you pull any funny business while we are down in the tunnels, I will not hesitate to swing this bat at you."

Billy raised an eyebrow as he tied the bandana over his mouth, "You know Harrington, you get violent when you're on edge."

Steve rolled his eyes, "Yeah, well, look who's talking."

That drew out a hushed laugh from Billy, though that wasn't exactly Steve's intention. He didn't indulge the junior for much longer, and went about helping the kids get their gear together and secured. It was only a matter of time until they all were ready to drop, and, with some resign, Steve began helping them one by one down into the foreign hole in the ground.

When it came time for Billy and Steve to drop down themselves, Steve gave him one last stern look before climbing down the rope first. The moment his feet landed on the strange soil, Steve knew he wasn't in Hawkins anymore.

The air felt tight and constraining, and the weird particles floating around him caught him by surprise. The tunnels themselves weren't terribly dark, he could see the outlines of makeshift vines that culminated all along the walls. Steve shone his flashlight and found that the vines were more vein like, and they were... pulsating? He didn't get a chance to look closer, as Billy dropped down right beside him, startling him enough to drop his flashlight. He picked it up rather quickly, and his irritation with the junior only grew when he recognized the look of a smirk under Billy's bandana.

Ahead of them, Mike was holding out a drawing of the map, examining it with his own flashlight. "Yeah, I'm pretty sure it's this way," he said, shining the light down one end.

Dustin was standing beside him, looking over his shoulder. "You're pretty sure, or you're certain?"

"I'm 100% sure," Mike said, turning around to the rest of the group. "Just follow me."

Steve was quick to catch up with the boy, pulling him back by the shoulder, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, what did I say earlier? I'll be leading the way, alright? Any of you little shits die down here, I'm getting the blame. Got it, dipshit?" He turned back again, flashing his light directly into Billy's face. "You take the rear and make sure nothing's sneaking up from behind. The rest of you, c'mon, we're losing time already."

None of them complained, and the party began the trek through the dark tunnels.

THE MOMENT WHEN Steve dropped the lighter onto the gasoline drenched vines, it was if the whole tunnel started screaming. The ground shook and trembled as the flames spread. He kept the kids back as a handful of the vines began moving and stretching, reaching out into the open as if they were trying to escape the pain. It was unlike anything Steve had ever seen before, and as the flames and tendrils leapt higher and higher, he was finding it harder and harder to tear his eyes away from it all.

The beast was crying out in pain.

Steve could feel something slithering over his foot.

The beast was crying out in pain.

It slowly started up his leg.

The beast was crying out in pain.

Steve needed to help it.

The beast was crying out to him.

Rough hands lifted him back from under his arms, and Steve was knocked out of his trance as he was forcibly dragged away from the fire. He ended up on his ass, and swivelled his head to find that it was Billy who was pulling him away, yelling at him to get up, yelling that he needed to run.

Steve looked back at the scene one more time, the desire to collapse into the heat ghosting through his limbs as he finally shuffled up. Billy helped him up, gripping him by the sleeve and pulling him along to catch up with the kids, who were nowhere in sight.

Behind them, the bonfire raged on, calling Steve to come back.

They scrambled after the kids, tripping over each other and the uneven ground as they ran the way they came. Up ahead, Steve saw them all standing still, and he was about to shout at them to run if it wasn't for what he saw next.

As he and Billy came up behind them, Steve watched in horror as Dustin approached a Demo-dog, he hand stretched out towards it. He was about to panic, but then he noticed a patch of yellow on its backside.

Dart .

Dustin was talking to *Dart* .

How Dart was coherently understanding Dustin was beyond him, but Steve watched on as Dustin continued talking to the Demo-dog affectionately, even going as far as to kneel down in front of him. In the distance, Steve could hear the low rumble of screeching. They were coming closer, and they were running out of time. But they couldn't pass by Dart easily.

Dustin seemed to already know this, and he pulled open his backpack to fish through it. To Steve's amazement, he ended up grabbing a candy bar and offered it to the Demo-dog.

"I've got our favorite," Dustin cooed, "See? Nougat."

The Demo-dog grunted like he knew exactly what the Nougat was, and Dustin opened the package before tossing it out. Almost instantly, Dart began scarfing it down, and the sound was enough to make Steve nauseous. Dustin slowly rose, signalling with his gloved hand for the party to walk around.

One by one, they all stepped by without incident, with Dustin being the last to follow. Steve ushered him to c'mon, but not before the boy offered a last goodbye to his companion.

"I'll miss you buddy," Dustin said, his voice wavering. The sight made Steve's heartbreak, but even he knew they couldn't stay there any longer as he ushered the boy in front of him.

The party ran on, with Billy now taking the lead. Steve made sure that none of them lagged behind, and he kept them running on without stopping.

Eventually, they made it back to the entryway they had climbed through. Billy spun on his heels, immediately moving to help the kids get back up and out of the tunnel system. Steve helped as much as he could, but Billy was stronger than he was and was able to lift all of them with ease. And, to Steve's surprise, none of them complained about it either.

Lastly, it was Dustin's turn to go up, but right as he was about to grab hold of the rope, the haunting sound of running and crying rushed through the tunnels. Steve whipped around to see the shadows of the Demo-dogs splayed against the walls, and instinctively he grabbed his baseball bat, gripping it with firm, sweaty hands. Above them, Max, Lucas, and Mike were yelling at them all to climb up, but the first sight of the charging Demo-dogs told them that they were too late.

Steve braced himself for the pain, moving to stand center of the tunnel in front of both Billy and Dustin. In those split seconds he made sure he would get the full brunt of the onslaught. As long as he was the primary hit and not them, Steve would be alright.

They all rushed towards them, the horde larger than Steve could have even imagined. He was ready to swing at each and every last one of them.

But instead of attacking, the leader of the horde simply pushed past Steve, causing him to nearly fall over. One by one, all the beasts ran by without so much as a scratch. Steve held his ground, keeping his bat ready just in case, but soon, the last of the Demo-dogs came with the same result.

They barely touched him.

Steve didn't even notice how labored his breathing was until he straightened up. He needed to make sure that Dustin and Billy were okay though, and the sight he saw next caused him to take a step back in shock.

Billy had all but folded himself over Dustin's shaking form, his haunched back to Steve. Billy had used his body to shield Dustin from the beasts.

The junior lifted his head up and looked around, making sure that the coast was clear before he let go of Dustin.

"Alright," he said to the boy, maneuvering him towards the dangling rope, "Get your ass up there before you hurt yourself."

Steve watched Dustin clamber upwards and safely out of the tunnel. Billy pulled his bandana down and Steve was greeted by the sight of a toothy grin as he gestured to the rope, "After you."

The senior let out a sigh of relief, glad that they both were safe, and he started towards the rope.

And then he heard something behind him. And then the smile on Billy's face quickly turned into one of horror and desperation. And then Billy was shouting Steve's name. And then, before he even got the chance to turn around, Steve was thrown down onto the ground, crushed by an unearthly weight.

He tried to get out from under it, but from the corner of his eye he could see the thing rearing back its front legs. Suddenly, a searing pain ripped down his entire back, and he couldn't tell if the person screaming was him or someone else.

His back was on fire, and the pain came back again in full force, and

all Steve wanted was it to all end, to be back in the fire he had alighted at the tunnel's heart.

There was more screaming as his vision faded in and out.

When had he started crying?

The weight was shoved off of his back.

His body shuddered painfully, almost convulsing.

There was a sickening sound of something getting hit repeatedly, it's flesh squelching, it was screeching.

His shirt was soaking wet.

Someone was shouting for help.

He was vaguely aware of being lifted before his eyes rolled back into his head.

Steve fell asleep to the sound of crying and yelling.

HE HEARD PEOPLE arguing, but he wasn't sure over what.

"We need to take him to a hospital!"

"And tell them what? That he got mauled by an interdimensional dog creature with claws like knives?"

"No! We fucking tell them he got attacked by a lion or something!"

"Really? A lion in Hawkins?"

"I don't know what you people have roaming down here!"

"Well we can't just let him bleed out like this!"

"He's not bleeding out -- "

“Shut up, shut up! All of you! He’s waking up!”

“Back up! Give him some space!”

When he slowly blinked his eyes open, he immediately regretted it. The lighting overhead was harsh on his bleary eyes. His entire body felt like cement, and any slight movement sent a shock of pain through him.

But it was when he tried to turn his torso to the side did he scream.

Hands were on him immediately, trying to force him from moving any more, and his ears were pounding as everyone began talking at once. His back throbbed incredibly, and he groaned out in pain.

What was wrong with him?

Someone was cradling his head, and something cool was placed on his forehead. He tried to open his eyes to see who it was, but his vision was blurring around the black dots that swam around him. He only had one guess of who it could be, as he had a similar moment not too long ago.

“Billy?”

The room around him seemed to still. His vision started to come back into focus, but instead of finding Billy’s face, his eyes locked onto the confused face of Nancy Wheeler.

She leaned down towards him, and her voice sounded just as broken as his did, “Steve, it’s me, it’s Nance.”

He tried to move again, but more hands stilled him. He looked around, trying to take in the people around him.

Jonathan. Joyce. Mike. Eleven. Hopper. Dustin. Lucas. And Will.

Steve realized he was in someone’s bed, in a bedroom he didn’t recognize. Nancy was next to him, moving what now felt like a cold washcloth from his forehead.

“Where am I?” he asked slowly.

“My room,” Jonathan answered.

A teary eyed Dustin piped up, “We brought you in here when we got back from the tunnels. You were unconscious... you’ve been unconscious for almost two hours now.”

Two hours?

Steve licked his chapped lips. “Why... why does my back hurt so bad?”

The room fell silent again.

“What happened in the tunnels?” Steve tried again. “I thought... I thought we were safe...”

“We were...” Mike said slowly.

“But you and Billy were still down there,” Lucas followed, “And... you were about to come up when a Demo-dog showed up and attacked you.”

Steve immediately was alarmed. He needed to get up. He had to get up. But Hopper’s hands were on him again, restraining him from moving. Steve struggled for another minute, but soon the pain became too unbearable and he gave up.

“Please stop moving, Steve,” Nancy begged him, “You’re only making your injuries worse.”

It slowly dawned on him that Lucas had said him and *Billy* were down in the tunnel, and Steve looked around the room again trying to find the junior.

“What happened... after that?” he rasped, “Where’s Billy? And... Max is gone too.”

“Billy, he...” Dustin began, his face contorting into one of mild disgust. “After you got thrown down, Billy took your bat and began hitting the shit out of the Demo-dog. I... I’ve never seen someone so angry.”

"It was like he was a completely different person," Mike whispered. "We couldn't even recognize the Demo-dog when he was done with it."

Steve's eyes widened in shock. He didn't know what to say to that.

"After he killed it, he brought you back up to the surface," Dustin finished slowly. "Then we brought you here."

Steve let out a shaky breath, "Where is he?"

"He left," Hopper told him finally. "He... he wanted to stay, but he needed to take Max back home."

The senior laid there in silence.

Billy wasn't even there. He up and left.

"I hate to move you, but we need to wash your wounds again," Nancy informed him. "We can't risk you getting an infection."

He nodded, knowing all too well what that all entailed. Everyone backed away from the bed except for Jonathan, Hopper and Nancy. The trio helped Steve sit up from the bed, and he did everything in his power to not cry out again in pain. Hopper helped him swing his legs over the edge, and that was when Steve noticed he was missing his shirt. The cold air nipped at his sore skin as he let himself be pulled up onto his feet.

The trek to the bathroom felt like an eternity.

Hopper and Jonathan were at his sides, helping him walk, and Nancy walked ahead of them to turn on the bathroom light and sink. Steve watched her grab several washcloths, the bathroom light stinging his eyes.

When he stepped in front of the bathroom mirror, he didn't recognize himself.

His hair was sticking out in a sweaty mess, and his face still had traces of smeared blood among the purpling and blackening bruises. His chest was scratched up all over from falling down, and he had

sustained several cuts and minor bruises from the fall. But what he really wanted to see was behind him.

“Show me... my back,” he asked Hopper and Jonathan.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea -- “ Hopper started, but Steve only interrupted him.

“I need to see my back. P-please.”

Hopper sighed, and Jonathan looked unsure between Hopper and Nancy. But the chief nudged his head to the side, and soon the trio was walking in a circle. It took a moment, the bathroom they were in was rather small, but when Steve’s back was facing the mirror, he strained his head to see how badly he was injured.

And when he saw it all, a gasp ragged his breath.

Six claw marks traveled down the length of his backside, from shoulder blade to lower hip. There were several more claw marks that cut along his back diagonally, but they weren’t as deep as the six others. The skin was marred and raised, reddened to an almost maroon color. Some parts of the claw marks were cut so deep that blood still oozed from them, leaving dark trails down his back and onto his jeans.

His back was scarred beyond repair he realized.

He would have the imprint of these claw marks for the rest of his life.

The sob that racked through his body was a pained one, and he couldn’t rely on anyone to rip that pain away.

Notes for the Chapter:

What a freakin' chapter.

11. Half Light

Summary for the Chapter:

"Are you both alright?"

"I am," she nodded, "But Billy's... I think he might be depressed?"

~

As much as Billy seemed genuine in his desire to help him, Steve was still wary about it all. Just because Billy promised to never hurt him again doesn't guarantee that he will follow through with that promise. Steve didn't want to risk it. He couldn't.

Notes for the Chapter:

So I ended up taking a mini break from writing, which I wasn't planning at all but it was much needed I think. But here we are! Our entry into the next portion of our saga. A lot of things are being established in this chapter character wise, and we will be starting to explore some more inner personal stuff with both Billy and Steve.

Thank you all for the wonderful comments!! I apologize for replying so late to them all, but y'all mean so much to me so thank you from the bottom of my heart! And some personal news, my family found out the sex of our new coming family member, and I'll be the proud uncle of a niece! I'm going to spoil the shit out of her.

But anyhow, thank you again for reading, commenting and kudoing! Happy reading!

- Dave

Chapter Title: "Half Light" - BANNERS

STEVE FOUND HIMSELF standing out the door again, wondering whether or not he should just give in.

Just five days ago, the nightmare of the Upside Down had been resolved for good: Eleven had closed the gates, Will was back to normal again, and everyone was safe and sound.

Mostly.

Steve had been the one who sustained the worst injuries. Upon his request, Hopper and Joyce took him to the emergency room after waking up, while Nancy and Jonathan took the rest of the kids home. The three of them had remained there until way late in the afternoon. By the time everything was all done and squared away, Steve had walked out with stitches covering almost every inch of his back, an excessive amount of bandages to cover the stitches while healing, an extensive list of instructions, and a doctor's note stating at least a week's worth of decommission on Steve's part. The doctor's asked on end as to what had happened, and Hopper deflected them, talking on Steve's behalf that it was some sort of coyote or bobcat attack. They didn't believe him, but they didn't question it either, in favor of trying to suture up the gashes as fast and possible.

It was the most painful experience Steve had ever gone through, and it made him hate absolutely everything about those damn Demogorgon dogs.

Hopper had taken the doctor's note to Hawkins High for him, and since then Steve had been homebound. Everyday, Nancy and Jonathan had come over to help him clean and change his bandages, each time bringing along a different set of kids.

At first, it was just them, and both Steve and Jonathan had to console Nance when she saw the stitches. Then, it was Nancy, Jonathan, Will and Mike, who were both sympathetic and curious about the wounds. Next was Lucas and Dustin, and Steve had to reassure Dustin that he was fine (he wasn't, but he wasn't about to tell Dustin how much pain he was in). Then, it was Mike again and El, accompanied by Hopper, and El was mostly quiet, save for a sincere apology.

Now, it was Friday. Nancy had rung earlier, saying she and Jonathan

were unable to come by today. Which meant that Steve had to rebandage and clean his wounds by himself. Whenever they all came by, Nance was the one who would clean the wounds mostly, and Steve would take notice of what she did for whenever he would have to do it alone. But, as he leaned against the bathroom door, the task at hand just felt so daunting. He'd tried several times earlier to do it, but every time he couldn't bring himself to go inside the bathroom.

He didn't want to see it. Any of it. How mauled his back was. Steve had done his best to not look at it all unless he had to. Even if he caught a glance, even for a second, he felt as if there was bile rising up his throat, and the flashes he got of that night would come back with a violent force.

He banged his forehead on the wood. As if he already didn't like his body already, this shit was just the icing on the cake. He wouldn't be able to look at himself the same way again. And the thought of having to explain to someone just why his body looked so fucking mangled was enough to make him sick.

And the scars would be the worst part of it all, a forever reminder of something that shouldn't have even happened to begin with.

The silver lining with it all though, the thought that was still keeping him going, was that it was really only himself that hurt. The kids were alright. They were alright. That's what he wanted all along. And Billy...

Steve banged his head again lightly, but the sound came out louder than it was supposed to be, reverberating along the walls of the empty house. He stepped back, narrowing his eyes a little at the door. Then the bang came again, more this time, and it took him a moment to realize that it wasn't coming from the bathroom door. There was someone knocking on the front door downstairs.

He hurried downstairs, trying to not move his back around too much, and with quick strides he was at the door, pulling one open. He expected to see Nancy, or Jonathan, but instead, he found a familiar redhead with her arms crossed standing on his doorstep.

"Max?" he asked stupidly, surprised to see her.

She rolled her eyes, “Duh.”

He stepped aside, allowing for her to come in. Steve looked across the yard for a moment, “Did you come by here yourself?”

“Yeah,” she replied, pulling off her jacket. Steve noted the chilly weather as she went on, “I walked here.”

Steve was pulling the door shut when he nearly bumped into her, and he turned to catch her eyes scanning over his face several times.

“Why do you look look so beat up?”

He raised an eyebrow at her, “What are you talking about?”

“Your face, it’s all purple and whatever.”

“It’s from your step brother beating the crap out of me,” he said a little slowly. His face was worse a couple of days ago, but now it just turned into patches of dark reds and purples scattered about from where he’d gotten punched. There was small parts of his face still a little swollen, like around his left eye, but for the most part it all was slowly going away. “Doesn’t he still have some bruising too?”

She shook her head with a slight frown, “He’s all cleared up now.”

Both Steve’s eyebrows rose at that. Either he had weak punches, or Billy was a quick healer. Something nagged at the back of his mind, something that had him puzzled before, but he couldn’t quite remember what it was.

“Well, good for him then,” he said, switching the subject quickly, “C’mon, let’s go sit down. Do you want anything, water or soda or somethin’?”

She followed him into the kitchen, and Steve flipped on the lights. “Maybe like a glass of water,” she said as she hoisted herself onto the tile counter. Steve nodded, opening up a cabinet and reaching up for a glass. He immediately regretted the action, as pain bolted down his shoulder blade, causing him to hiss sharply.

Max was off the counter and by his side almost instantly, “Steve are

you alright? What happened?”

He rolled back his shoulder carefully, feeling the pain again, though more dull this time, “It’s just my back. I ended up getting stitches for the scratches and it’s still trying to heal itself.”

“I heard,” she remarked sympathetically. “Must hurt like hell.”

“It does,” he told her, reaching for a glass that was in the sink this time. “So, why’re you here?”

Max shifted on her feet, “Well, I just wanted to see how you were doing. Everyone’s been telling me how you’ve been holding up, but I wanted to see for myself.” Steve handed her the glass, now full with water, and she graciously took a sip of it.

“I’m doing alright for the most part,” he tells her. “Alright as I can be anyway. I’m on house arrest until Sunday. But I can’t be doing anything too strenuous for a long time.”

He leads her to the dining room as he speaks, he makes sure to turn on the lights, and they sit down at the table casually.

“The doctors said I should come back in a couple of weeks to get the stitches removed,” he went on, “And after that I need to come in semi-regularly for check ups. The scratches were so deep that they want to keep an eye on me for awhile until they’re sure everything is alright.”

“Makes sense,” Max mumbled over the rim of the glass. They lull into a momentary silence, simply sitting in the company of each other.

Steve casts his eyes sideways at her, noticing how her leg is bouncing. She looks like she wants to say something to him, but there’s something keeping her at bay. There’s something he wants to ask her as well, and he figured he’d go first and hope that the conversation leans towards what she’s wanting to talk about.

“So what happened that night?

She looks up from her glass, “Huh?”

“The night we all went to the tunnels,” he clarifies, “What happened after I blacked out?”

Where did you and Billy go?

He watches her slowly set the glass onto the table. She keeps her eyes trained on the glass as she speaks, “Billy... he brought you up from the tunnel himself and... you were bleeding everywhere... and we all thought you were dead. Billy kept trying to wake you up, and you were mumbling for a bit but then you went silent. We didn’t know what to do, if we had to take you to the hospital. We ended up taking you back to Will’s house, I ended up driving because Billy wouldn’t let go of you. When we got there, he carried you inside and we put you in one of the bedrooms and we started cleaning your wounds. Seeing you like that was... it was horrible. We had to make sure you were still breathing... we were so sure you were going to...”

She shook her head, “Everyone else came back shortly after we got there. We all did the best we could to clean the blood and everything, and the only thing we could really do was wait. And... we waited so long, we all were just in that room looking at you and making sure you were still alive. But Billy and I... we had to leave. I didn’t want to, Billy didn’t want to, but our dad was waiting and...”

She trailed off again, her voice lowering to almost a whisper. “Coming home... it wasn’t pretty. Billy took the blame for it all, and I don’t think either of us slept that night.”

What troubled Steve most was the vagueness of the very end. What did she mean by ‘wasn’t pretty’? What did he take the blame for?

He reeled in the questions except for, “Are you both alright?”

“I am,” she nodded, “But Billy’s... I think he might be depressed?”

The comment had him whipping his head to face her head on. Pain flared down his back again, but he held it in by gritting his teeth. “What do you mean depressed?” he managed to ask.

Max sighed, “I don’t know. He hasn’t left his room really other than for school and he isn’t really talking to anyone and... he’s just being

really weird, and I don't know what to do. I've never seen him act like this before. At first I thought it was just because of whatever all happened but... now I'm not sure. Which is kinda part of the reason why I'm here. I was hoping that maybe you could talk to him and figure out what's going on?"

"M-me?" Steve blurted out, "Why?"

"Because you're the one he only really likes," she admitted. "And I don't think he would listen to me."

Steve let out a forced laugh, "Hargrove doesn't like me. He couldn't care less about me."

"You say that but I know he does! I - Last Saturday I heard him mumbling to himself when he was working out, and he mentioned something about you so I decided to eavesdrop - don't look at me like that, it wasn't like I was committing a crime or whatever - and he said something about an argument I think and then something along the lines of him going to apologize or going to see you and - "

"Woah, woah, woah, slow down there," Steve stopped her, "Just because he was saying all that doesn't mean he cares."

Max groaned, frustration fueling her movements as she wiped her face with her hands. "But I know Billy, okay? I literally live with him, and I know how he is about things and people, and he doesn't give a shit about anyone. So when I hear him, *mumbling to himself about you of all people*, then there's gotta be something there. Even you can't deny that."

And Steve couldn't.

But he still really wasn't willing to go and talk to Billy after what all happened.

Max could see the look of apprehension on his face, and she sighed, "Please, could you just do this one thing for me? Look... I don't know who else to go to. Everyone else kinda hate him."

Steve scoffs at that. He really did want to say no. He didn't know what would happen if they saw each other but... Steve knew at some

point they would have to see one another because of school. And basketball. Fuck he forgot about basketball.

Plus the longer he looked at Max the harder it was to say no to her.

Steve sighed as he scooted back his chair, “Just let me get my shoes on.”

Max let out a triumphant yes, and it was Steve’s turn to roll his eyes, “I’m only doing it because I’m taking you home anyway. It’s getting too cold to be walking outside.”

“Whatever makes you sleep at night,” Max grins, and if he was in the condition to do so, Steve would have ran her out of the dining room.

THAT WAS HOW Steve found himself walking up to the door of Billy Hargrove’s home for the first time, with each step that closed the distance filling him with a slight dread. Their single level house was quiet and unassuming, nearly blending in with the rest of the houses that sparsely lined the street. Behind the house lay a dense treeline that made Steve’s skin crawl with ill memories.

Max bumped her shoulder against his arm, “C’mon, my parents will be home late so let’s use all the time we can get.”

Steve nods, getting the feeling that he probably doesn’t want to have a run in with their parents, and he follows her as they approach the front door. She pulls out a set of keys and unlocks the front door, ducking inside. She’s announcing her arrival out loud as Steve shuts the door behind them. From somewhere in the house, they both can hear rock music blaring. They walk into a living room of sorts, with an older couch against the far wall and a fireplace on the opposite. Steve can see down the house, noting another the room next door having a tv, more chairs, and a bench with weights, and even further down seeming to be the dining room or kitchen area. The space looked very much lived in, and Steve wondered just how long they all had been in Hawkins for.

Max doesn’t get a response from the junior, which makes her huff

aloud. "He's been holed up in his room ever since we got back from school," Max mentions, "Which, I guess, is kinda nice. He hasn't been harassing me as much anymore. Though that might be because I took a swing at his junk with your bat."

Steve had been moving towards the other room, but the comment had him faltering and nearly tripping over one of the chairs as he carefully spun around, "You what?!"

She shrugs, "After he knocked you out, I put him out with some syringe thing and warned him to stop messing with us by swinging the bat at his crotch. Then he passed out."

The *syringe* . That's what was bugging him earlier, with Billy's abnormally quick recovery from it. the junior just naturally a fast healer? Which was odd, and realistically didn't make much sense. Maybe it was because he's healthy? Well, healthy-ish, aside from the smoking, but Billy's build is incredibly muscular... could that have something to do with it?

He didn't get much time to dwell on much, Max was gesturing to him to follow. She lead him through the house rather quickly, and they followed the blaring music through a doorway. She stopped right outside Billy's bedroom, the door closed. Steve stood behind her awkwardly as she pounded on the door.

From inside, the music lowered, and the sound of Billy's voice filled Steve's ears as he shouted through the door, "Kinda busy Max, what do you want?"

"Someone's here to see you!" she tells him.

"Well tell 'em to fuck off," he calls. The music turns up a couple of notches again.

Max pounds on the door again, "What if I told you it was Steve?"

There's a loud bang from inside, as if something heavy fell to the floor. Then there's a pause before they hear Billy again. "Quit bullshittin' me kid, he told me to stay away from him so why the fuck would he be here?"

Steve raises his eyebrows at the comment. He'd completely forgotten about telling Billy that. The junior sounded bitter when he said it too, and Steve had to wonder just how much that affected Billy.

Max went to say something again, but Steve stopped her by holding up his hand. He moved closer to the door, his face hovering mere inches away from it. He cleared his throat, and he did his best to speak over the loud music.

"Hargrove?"

And at first, nothing happens. So Steve tries again.

"Hargrove, it's me. Open up."

The music gets killed inside, and moments later the bedroom door swings open. Steve should have taken a step back, because Billy ends up being closer than he'd imagine to be. True to Max's word, there are no bruises along Billy's face, but there was a bit of stubble along his face that was new to Steve. There was also bags starting to form under his eyes, but in that moment he looked as alert as Steve had ever seen him.

"Harrington," he breathed out, as if he couldn't believe what he was seeing. "What're you doing here?"

"I... " he turned around, looking for Max except finding that she had all but disappeared. He turned back, mentally cursing, "Can I come in?"

Billy said nothing as he stepped to the side. Truth be told, Steve didn't really know what to expect walking into Billy's room. It was less messy than he thought it would be, with bits of clothes strewn about here and there, but for the most part it was relatively clean. Posters of girls and cars lined the walls, and numerous shelves were lined with personal belongings such as old photos, colognes, games, electronics and cassettes. In one corner of the room stood a full body mirror and a large stereo, and in the other corner was a desk, chair and more workout equipment. The unmade bed was positioned between two windows, and beside the bed on the floor was heavy looking dumbbell. Steve wondered if that's what was dropped earlier.

Steve opted to sit down on the bed, fairly certain that sitting on the floor would cause him some pain. The sound of the bedroom door closing caused Steve's heart rate to spike, and he cautiously watched Billy cross the room to sit at the desk.

The senior didn't know what to say. Part of him wanted to leave, but he knew that if he didn't at least try to figure out what was wrong with Billy, he'd never hear the end of it from Max.

Before he could say anything, Billy was the first to speak.

"How are you doing?" he asked.

"I'm alright," was all Steve said.

Billy made a face, "But how are you *really* doing?"

Steve stared at him, uncertain as to tell the truth or not. Because really, Steve wasn't doing alright at all. So many things weren't adding up in his head and it all was hurting him so badly and he just wanted a sense of normalcy again.

"I... I could be better," Steve smiled sadly. "My body hurts constantly. Every time I move my back is in so much pain. The most I've slept this week is an hour and a half and I've only been running on coffee because every time I fall asleep I have nightmares of those tunnels but I want nothing more than to rest and I just can't. My back is marred beyond belief, and I get sick thinking about having to live with it for the rest of my life and having to lie and say I got mauled by a wild animal. I don't really know what's going on with anything or anyone anymore, Hargrove. So, no, I'm not doing alright. I'm not alright at all."

Billy blinked, opening his mouth to speak but no words came out. He closed his mouth and looked down at the floor, wringing his hands. Steve looked away, slightly embarrassed at having suddenly gushed everything out like that.

"I'm sorry," Billy murmured. He talked slow, as if trying to pick the right words as he spoke, "I... I didn't want to leave you there. At that guy's house. I wanted to be there when you woke up. I wanted to

help you and I wanted to apologize. For everything I did. I wasn't thinking, I don't know what I was thinking, I don't even know why I acted like that but it all happened and by the time I was waking up I realized just what I had done."

He watched Billy rise from the chair and cross the space between them. He didn't flinch away when Billy moved to grasp Steve's hands in his own gently, he didn't flinch away when Billy pressed a soft kiss onto both Steve's knuckles, and he didn't flinch away when Billy raised Steve's hands and pressed his cheek against them.

Billy stood there like that for what seemed like forever, and Steve sat there mystified. Finally, Billy continued on, raising his head just enough to look Steve directly in the eyes, his lips ghosting along Steve's fingers.

"I'm sorry. I'm probably not making a lot of sense. But... I'm not asking you to forgive me. I thought long and hard this week about what I did to you, and I can't ask you to forgive me. Hell, I don't even forgive myself for losing control like that. The only thing I can do is tell you that I was wrong, and that I will never hurt you like that again. And... if you never want anything to do with me ever again, I understand."

Steve was again at a loss for words, completely surprised to be hearing him say any of this. Slowly, Steve slid his hands away from Billy's, the junior loosening his grip completely, and he let them fall to his lap. Steve tried his best to look Billy in the eye, but he couldn't keep the contact for long, with every other sentence breaking away to look at the floor and then back up through his lashes.

"I... you're right, Hargrove. I can't forgive you. I don't think I could ever forgive you for that. But it means a lot to me to hear you say that. And... I just at least wanted to say thank you for everything you did to get me back to Jonathan's house. Who knows what would have happened if you weren't there."

Billy nodded, his expression sad, but Steve knew he was satisfied nonetheless with his words.

"How is your back...?" Billy asked him. "Max had said something

about stitches?”

Steve sighed, “Yeah, I ended up going to the hospital. They completely stitched everything and bandaged it all. I have to keep changing the bandages and cleaning the stitches everyday until they're removed.”

“When would that be?”

“Not sure,” Steve shrugged a little, “The wounds were so deep that they suggested keeping them in for longer than normal, so I gotta keep checking in with them until they say the stitches are ready to come out.”

“That sounds awful,” Billy admitted. “I can’t imagine having to do all that by yourself.”

“Well, Nancy actually has been the one to do it,” Steve told him, “But, I can’t keep having her and Jonathan come over like that. She wasn’t able to come by today, and I still haven’t cleaned it or anything.”

The mentioning of Nancy coming over seemed to change Billy in a way, and his posture visibly stiffened.

Steve’s brows furrowed at the odd sight, “Are you alright?”

The junior didn’t answer, instead saying, “If you want, I could do that for you. She and him don’t have to go out of their way like that, and I’m usually not doing anything anyway.”

“I couldn’t ask you to - “

“Really, I don’t mind.”

“Are you sure about - “

“I’m absolutely positive.”

Steve blinked. “Everyday?”

“Everyday until you don’t need me to anymore,” Billy nodded.

Steve eyed him for a moment, noting how quickly and willingly Billy was to help him with caring for the stitches. He had a feeling it was partly due to the junior wanting to be in his good graces again, while another part of him was sure it was because he'd mentioned Nancy (and Jonathan) coming over originally.

As much as Billy seemed genuine in his desire to help him, Steve was still wary about it all. Just because Billy promised to never hurt him again doesn't guarantee that he will follow through with that promise. Steve didn't want to risk it. He couldn't. And, with his current state, Steve wasn't sure if he would even be able to fend for himself in case something *did* happen. Steve didn't doubt that maybe one of these days they could get back to square one, that maybe things will get solved finally, that maybe they might actually be friends, or even *maybe* ...

He shook his head, "Thanks Hargrove, for uh, wanting to do that. But I gotta start at least trying to clean 'em myself so I don't have to ask for help. But if I need to, I'll... take you up on that offer."

Steve didn't miss the way Billy's features seemed to deflate, however nor did he miss the gleam of hope in the juniors eyes.

Billy offered a small quirked smile to him, the one Steve had seen only a couple times before. "Got it. Well. You should probably head out, my parents will be home soon."

"Yeah," Steve agreed, rising up from the bed. Billy took a couple steps back, allowing some space between them. Huh. The junior followed Steve out of his room, and Steve looked up and down the hallway.

"Where's Max's room?" he asked, turning back to Billy.

Billy pointed down the hallway, then sidestepped Steve to lead the way.

Max's room was situated at the opposite end of the house, closer towards the edge of the woods. Her door was shut, so Steve knocked on it several times. Unlike Billy's reaction earlier, the door flew open to reveal a supposedly casual Max.

“Hey,” Steve greeted her again, seeing how her eyes traveled to him and then to Billy, who was standing a couple feet away now. “I’m about to head out, I just wanted to make sure that everything was good.”

“Oh! Yeah, no, I’m fine!” she said with some surprise. “All good here.”

Steve nodded, then lowered down a bit to whisper to her, making sure that Billy couldn’t hear them. “He’ll be alright from now on, don’t worry about it.”

He stood back up slowly, mindful of his movements, and couldn’t help but smile at the sight of Max beaming up at him.

She thanked him, and Steve shrugged nonchalantly.

“By the way,” he started, now looking between the two step siblings, “You guys got a phone?”

“Yeah, why?” Billy answered him.

He turned to Max, “Could you get me a paper and pen?”

Max disappeared into her room, coming back a few moments later with some scratch paper and a pencil. Steve wrote down a series of numbers before handing the paper and pencil to Max, “That’s my house number, just in case you need to reach me. Call if you need anything, okay?”

Steve wasn’t sure who exactly he was addressing, but Max nodded and folded the paper up into her back pocket. Steve took the chance to ruffle Max’s hair again, “See you ‘round kid,” he laughed as she waved his hands away.

“Yeah, yeah, whatever,” she replied coolly before shutting her door closed once more.

Steve’s smirk faltered only a bit when he turned around, finding that Billy was eyeing him curiously with a blank expression.

“Something wrong, Hargrove?” he asked, stepping past the junior as

he spoke.

Billy followed Steve out to the front room, "You and Max get along pretty well."

"Yeah, well, she's got good taste in character," Steve joked, trying to light the mood, which earned a low hum from the other. They reached the front door, and Billy graciously opened it for him. Steve looked outside, surprised to find that it had gotten so dark already. The air had gotten colder too. He wondered mindlessly if there was going to be snow sometime soon.

Billy cleared his throat and caught Steve's attention again.

"You, uh, drive safe Harrington," he said.

Steve offered him a small appreciative smile before walking back out into the cold. Billy was still standing in the doorway when Steve was climbing into his car. He was still in the doorway when he began pulling out into the road. And he was still in the doorway as Steve drove off down the road.

It didn't take very long for him to reach his home thankfully, and his thoughts wandered to the insanity of Max walking from her house to his. The walk would easily be thirty or more minutes he figured, that and then on top of how cold it was getting now, Billy really should have just drove her over.

But then again, Billy was told by Steve himself to stay away. The thought made him cringe.

When Steve stepped out of the car, he made quickly to the front door. The air seemed to be getting colder by the minute. The house was freezing when Steve walked inside. The sound of his own footsteps was the only indication of the house not being empty anymore. He walked about the lower part of the house, flipping on all the lights to cast away the uneasy darkness. He had meant to do this earlier before he left, but Max distracted him. Steve had found that the dark made him anxious now, and that keeping on all the lights made him feel better.

Safer.

Warmer.

He always kept the lights on.

It made it seem like the house was on fire.

A bonfire.

He wandered upstairs, moving up and down the hallway to turn on all the lights. By the time he got everything switched on, he turned to look down towards the opposite end of the hallway.

He didn't want to go down there. But his feet started moving of their own accord. Step by step, he came closer and closer. His mind raced, his thoughts overwhelming.

His pain. The Upside Down. The Demo-dogs. His parents. His friends. Nancy. Jonathan. The kids. Dustin. Eleven. Max. Who else? Billy.

His pain. The Upside Down. The tunnels. His parents. His friends. Nancy. Jonathan. The kids. Dustin. Eleven. Max. Who else? Billy Hargrove.

His pain. The Upside Down. The beast. His parents. His friends. Nancy. Jonathan. The kids. Dustin. Eleven. Max. Who else? His Billy.

He reached the end and stopped.

Steve found himself standing outside the door again, wondering whether or not he should just give in.